

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Rob Portman

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY & GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

“DOMESTIC EXTREMISM IN AMERICA: EXAMINING WHITE SUPREMACIST VIOLENCE IN
THE WAKE OF RECENT ATTACKS.”

JUNE 9, 2022

AS PREPARED

Thank you, Chairman Peters, for holding this hearing on domestic extremism and white supremacist violence. All of us must condemn these hateful attacks. While this hearing is being held to address the threat of white supremacy in the wake of last month’s horrific attack which killed ten shoppers in a grocery store in Buffalo, we also know that violent threats to Americans transcend any one ideology.

Tuesday night, an armed man was arrested for the attempted murder of Justice Kavanaugh. This attempt by a violent far-left extremist is the latest example that threats to our country cannot be put in a single ideological box. Some threats have apparently nothing to do with race or ideology, as we saw last month when a deranged eighteen-year-old killed fourth-graders and their teachers in Uvalde, Texas. And we also learned last month that an Islamic State operative was plotting in Columbus, Ohio and the greater Detroit, Michigan area to smuggle other terrorists over our southern border to murder former President George W. Bush. In 2018, 11 Jewish Americans were murdered while practicing their faith at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And Ohio too has certainly felt the effects of extremist violence. We suffered the loss of nine Ohioans when an assailant with far-left extremist ideologies attacked a crowd of people on a busy street in Dayton three years ago.

This Committee does not have the data we need on this issue because the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Counterterrorism Center, although required to do so by the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, have not provided domestic terrorism data annually to Congress. The first report was overdue by about a year, and the Committee has received no indication when we should expect to receive the second annual report, that is already late. Some of today’s testimony will express concerns over the lack of data on domestic terrorism. This data is statutorily required to be delivered to

Congress and the American people. It is unacceptable that the Administration so delayed in getting us this necessary information.

I should also note that the most recent domestic terrorism data provided to Congress from the FBI revealed that the most lethal domestic terrorist threat in 2020 was posed by anti-government extremists, including anarchists. Just this week, DHS released a terrorist threat bulletin which assessed the number one threat of mass violence in the United States comes from those motivated by a *range* of ideological beliefs and grievances. White supremacy is certainly among those, but this Committee should be looking at all lethal terrorist threats.

In addition to data, this Committee has not yet received the requested information or other details pertaining to the implementation of the Biden Administration's Domestic Terrorism Strategy that was released one year ago.

I also look forward to receiving more information from DHS and the FBI regarding reports that it took weeks to arrest a watch-listed terrorist who had crossed into the United States at the Southern Border, as well as evaluate claims made by the Islamic State operative arrested in Ohio, who told FBI informants he smuggled members of Hezbollah into the country. These terrorists seek to exploit our borders and asylum systems to gain entry to the United States and this Committee must examine federal law enforcement's ability to stop these incidents from happening. Last month, the Secretary of Homeland Security confirmed that 42 individuals on the terrorist watchlists were encountered at our southern border in the last year – and we have still not been provided the requested information by the Department on whether these individuals pose a current threat. We all know that the border is not secure, known terrorists are entering the country, drugs are flowing across the border, and all these things pose a real threat to Americans.

We know from law enforcement that domestic extremist violence makes up a large proportion of the acts of terror committed in the United States. These acts of violence are abhorrent and should be condemned to the fullest extent. These acts of hate go against our American values and serves as a reminder that domestic violent extremism continues to threaten and harm our communities. My heart goes out to the victims' families, and I hope that the conversation had today will shed light on solutions for preventing future violence.

I will continue to reach across the aisle so we can create legislative solutions that prevent this lethal violence. I was pleased that my bipartisan bill, the Pray Safe Act – which establishes a centralized clearinghouse of safety and security best practices for houses of worship to harden against acts of terrorism – passed the Senate by unanimous consent. I urge my colleagues in the House to hold a vote on this important legislation as soon as possible.

I also remain committed in my support of the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, or NSGP, which I have worked to authorize and secure additional funding from appropriators. I look forward to working with my colleagues to fund the NSGP at a level that is commensurate with the heightened threat environment.

Finally, I want to thank the witnesses for testifying before us today. I am especially pleased to welcome Ambassador Nathan Sales – a fellow Ohioan – whom I had the pleasure of introducing at his 2017 Senate Foreign Relations Committee nomination hearing to be the State Department’s Coordinator for Counterterrorism. Ambassador Sales did great work to protect the United States against threats of global terrorism during his time at State and I look forward to hearing more of his valuable insights on the terrorist threat landscape during his testimony.

Thank you again, Chairman Peters.