



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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Media Contact: Susan Phalen
(202) 226-8477

**Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX)
Committee on Homeland Security**

Markup: H.R. 2899

Remarks as Prepared

Our hearing today highlighted a stark reality: in the face of mounting threats, our government is doing far too little to counter violent extremism here in the United States. Whether it is the long reach of international terrorists into our communities or the homegrown hate spread by domestic extremist groups, we are ill-equipped to prevent Americans from being recruited by dangerous fanatics.

That is why today we are considering H.R. 2899, the Countering Violent Extremism Act of 2015. This bill would elevate, accelerate, and streamline the Department of Homeland Security's CVE efforts.

Among other much-needed enhancements, the bill would:

- Make CVE a top DHS priority by establishing the highest-ranking federal official dedicated to countering the radicalization and recruitment of Americans by violent extremist groups;
- Streamline the messy and bureaucratic CVE structure at DHS so that we can act more decisively;
- Provide DHS with the ability to counter-message terrorist propaganda by groups like ISIS here in the homeland; and most importantly,
- Allow DHS to empower communities who are on the frontlines of the threat through better awareness and training.

This legislation would increase accountability by putting someone in charge of these issues, and it would put in place stricter civil rights and civil liberties protections than DHS is currently required to abide by when it comes to CVE. Elevating this office and providing new leadership is not "new bureaucracy." Instead, our bill uses existing funds within the Department to streamline our approach to CVE.

Right now, there are at least a half-dozen offices, agencies, or directorates which report directly to the Secretary and have some type of responsibility tied to CVE. Our bill makes one official the lead, who is accountable to both the Secretary, to Congress, and to the American people. This cuts through the bureaucracy to elevate CVE and increase transparency.

It is important for us to come together on this issue. We heard from our witnesses today—just as we have heard from the President of the United States—that we need to do more and we need to accelerate our CVE efforts. But we have already waited too long. In the six months since we first shared this legislation with our Democratic counterparts, dozens more aspiring terrorists have been arrested on U.S. soil, and we have seen a proliferation of sinister plots.

We cannot wait any longer, and this Administration appears to agree. It is worth noting that neither the White House nor the Department of Homeland Security have opposed this bill. Instead, we have received a letter from Secretary Johnson emphasizing how important CVE is right now, and we've seen countless statements from the President about how we need to do more.

I also reject the idea that this Committee has not been focused on the issue. We have been heavily focused on CVE since the last Congress—and this Committee has been discussing the subject for years. In addition to public and classified hearings, we have held countless bipartisan Member briefings and site visits, and six months ago Ranking Member Thompson and I launched a bipartisan Task Force of eight Members to look at the foreign fighter threat. That Task Force has touched on CVE issues nearly every week so far this year in briefings and site visits. Those Task Force meetings also have been open to every Member of this Committee, and I am pleased that some have taken the opportunity to attend.

Most importantly, today we have a chance to move beyond partisan bickering and beyond simplistic debates about which group or violent ideology is more deadly. My gravest concern of course has been the Islamist terror threat facing our country. But Americans want our government to do whatever it can to prevent the planning and execution of any type of violent extremist attack--regardless of whether it is motivated by warped views of Islam, reprehensible views of race, or other issues meant to intimidate and coerce our people.

Accordingly, this legislation ramps up the Department's ability to tackle both international and domestic extremist threats based on level of risk, not on politics. It does not focus on a specific group or a specific ideology. Terrorists of all stripes have issued a call to arms to solicit new recruits. Now we must issue our own: We are prepared to turn the tide against them.

Every day we wait, we cede more ground to our adversaries. As Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, I will not stand on the sidelines--asking for more reports and studies--while terrorists plot inside our communities, while people are murdered in their places of worship, and while violent extremists seek to divide our nation.

I call upon my colleagues to put aside their differences and support this legislation to show resolve that Americans will not submit to terror--we will strike back against it.

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