



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

The Way Forward on Homeland Security

March 17, 2021

The Committee on Homeland Security is meeting today to examine “The Way Forward on Homeland Security.” We are joined by Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, who is testifying before Congress for the first time since being sworn in last month. We look forward to speaking to him about the Administration’s vision for the future of the Department of Homeland Security.

To be sure, Secretary Mayorkas has inherited a Department damaged by the previous Administration and its failed homeland security policies. For years, President Trump left DHS without a lawfully appointed, confirmed Secretary and kept critical positions vacant so he could exploit the Department for political gain. I am pleased that President Biden has made some key nominations and look forward to competent, Senate-confirmed leadership now that Secretary Mayorkas has been sworn in and the Administration is moving forward with filling leadership positions across the Department.

Just as President Trump made DHS less able to carry out its mission, his failed policies also made the homeland less secure. He downplayed the threat of COVID-19 despite the warnings of doctors and scientists, left states to fend for themselves to obtain testing supplies and PPE, and failed to implement a national vaccine distribution plan. He sided with Putin and Russia over our own intelligence community even though our adversary meddled in our elections and hacked into our computer systems. And, he helped fuel the rise of domestic terrorism in America and incited right-wing violent extremists to attack the U.S. Capitol.

Americans continue to pay the price for these failures, with over half a million dead from COVID-19, experts struggling to understand the scope of the SolarWinds hack, and an unprecedented surge in domestic terrorism. Secretary Mayorkas and the 240,000 dedicated, hardworking men and women of DHS are left to deal with the mess the last Administration left behind. This will be no easy task, and Congress should be focused on ensuring the Department has the resources and authorities to do so.

Unfortunately, some are so desperate to make Americans forget Trump’s failures, they have resorted to fear-mongering about the challenge we face at the border. That rhetoric is shameful and does nothing to improve the situation on the ground. Others are engaging in revisionist history, saying that all was well at the border under the last Administration. Nothing could be further from the truth.

During the 2019 surge at the border, President Trump ripped thousands of children from their parents, hundreds of whom have still not been reunited, and only stopped when the American people rejected his immoral policy. He implemented policies to discourage family members from coming forward to sponsor unaccompanied children and left kids to languish in government shelters for months.

He squandered billions in taxpayer money on a politically motivated border wall that is useless for responding to an influx children and families. He cut off lawful means of immigration, dismantled our immigration infrastructure, and refused to address the underlying causes of migration. Let me be clear –

the Trump Administration's cruel, shortsighted policies directly contributed to the situation at the border now.

The Biden Administration is taking action. Administration officials have announced repeatedly that people should not come to the border now. The Administration is increasing capacity to shelter unaccompanied kids humanely, while testing them for COVID-19. It is restarting the Central American Minors program to allow vulnerable children to apply to come to the United States in a safe and orderly way.

Meanwhile, DHS is reluctantly continuing to use its authority to expel adults and family units from the U.S. in order to manage increased flows in the near term. In fact, the Biden Administration is expelling more people than the previous one. Our borders are not open. Clearly more will have to be done to respond to the situation while upholding our values. What we must not do is return to the morally bankrupt policies of the last administration towards children. Rest assured this Committee will continue to conduct careful oversight of the Department's actions at the border.

I want to hear from Secretary Mayorkas about how the Department is responding. Meanwhile, we must not take our eyes off homeland security threats like terrorism, cyber attacks, and disaster preparedness and response.

For its part, the Biden Administration is working to rebuild DHS, reform our Nation's homeland security policy, and address the situation at the border while upholding our values. However, it cannot be expected to repair in a matter of weeks everything President Trump destroyed over four years.

I look forward today to hearing from Secretary Mayorkas about his vision for the way forward on homeland security.

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