



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Worldwide Threats to the Homeland

September 17, 2020

Before we begin, I want to say our thoughts are with those Americans dealing with devastating natural disasters, including the wildfires in the West and Hurricane Sally in the South. As Chairman, I remain committed to ensuring they receive the Federal help needed to respond, recover, and build back stronger.

Today, the Committee on Homeland Security is meeting for its annual hearing on “Worldwide Threats to the Homeland.” Our Nation recently observed the 19th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Nearly two decades later, we continue to mourn the nearly 3,000 lives lost that terrible day and keep their loved ones in our prayers.

This Committee and the Department of Homeland Security were established in the wake of 9/11 to help prevent future attacks on our soil. Regardless of who was Chairman, we have held regular hearings examining worldwide threats with leaders from the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, and National Counterterrorism Center. And regardless of who has occupied the White House, whether Democrat or Republican, we have received cooperation in that effort.

Today was supposed to be no different. Unfortunately, as we see from the empty chair in front of us, Mr. Chad Wolf is not here to represent the Department of Homeland Security. Let me be very clear about how we got here.

The Committee began engaging with the Department over three months ago – on June 10, 2020 – to secure Mr. Wolf’s participation in this hearing, alongside his colleagues from the FBI and National Counterterrorism Center. Any assertion that the Administration committed to having DHS, FBI, and NCTC testify before this Committee at a worldwide threats hearing in July is false.

DHS tentatively offered a couple of dates but then could not agree with its FBI and NCTC counterparts on a date for the hearing in June or July. In fact, it was the Department of Homeland Security that conveyed to the Committee that September 17 was the earliest Mr. Wolf would be available to testify at this hearing. In the interest of receiving Mr. Wolf’s testimony, the Committee agreed to the offered date.

It was not until last week that the Department informed the Committee that Mr. Wolf would be reneging on the commitment to testify in anticipation of being nominated for Secretary of Homeland Security. I would note, that despite his refusal to testify today, Mr. Wolf has spoken to the media on multiple occasions since President Trump announced he intended to nominate Mr. Wolf to be Secretary of Homeland Security, including no fewer than four appearances on Fox News.

Mr. Wolf has run the Department of Homeland Security for the last 10 months and has been responsible for numerous decisions directly relevant to the subjects the Committee intends to explore. With that in mind, last week I wrote Mr. Wolf to make clear that there is no legal prohibition barring a nominee’s

testimony and to urge him to honor his commitment. In response, the Department again declined to provide Mr. Wolf to testify at this hearing. Faced with continued refusal, on Friday I issued a subpoena for his appearance in accordance with House and Committee Rules. Regrettably, he has chosen to defy the subpoena and refuses to come before the Committee after committing to do so should appall every Member of this Committee. Insisting Mr. Wolf keeps his commitment to testifying before Congress isn't playing politics — it's doing our job.

Congress has the authority and obligation to execute its Constitutional oversight responsibilities regarding Mr. Wolf's decisions and the Department's actions during his tenure. As Chairman, it is my responsibility to ensure the Committee fulfills its Constitutional responsibilities.

Nineteen years after the attacks of 9/11, we continue to face grave threats to the homeland. Including: the rise of domestic terrorism, ongoing foreign interference in the 2020 elections, and a coronavirus pandemic that has claimed nearly 200,000 American lives. As the person running the Department of Homeland Security, Mr. Wolf should be here to testify as Secretaries of Homeland Security have done before. Instead, we have an empty chair – an appropriate metaphor for the Trump Administration's dereliction on so many of these critical homeland security issues.

Mr. Wolf may attempt to evade oversight and the Department may try silly stunts to distract from this hearing, but we will not waiver. The stakes are just too high. Indeed, former Department officials – the Administration's own political appointees – are coming forward to sound the alarm that our Nation's security is being compromised in favor of the President's political interests.

Americans who care about securing the homeland and upholding our most sacred values expect their representatives to hold the Department of Homeland Security and this Administration accountable. Be assured that under my Chairmanship, I will not waiver in my commitment to doing so today or in the future. To that end, I am pleased that Director Wray and Director Miller are here today.

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