



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

***Strengthening the Safety and Security of Our Nation: The President's
FY2019 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security***

April 26, 2018

Today is your first appearance before the Committee on Homeland Security, four and a half months after your swearing-in as Secretary. I have served on the Committee on Homeland Security since its establishment, and have been fortunate to work with all five of your predecessors from both political parties.

Each of them, including your former boss, Secretary John Kelly, picked up the phone or stopped by to establish a working relationship within days of being sworn in to the position. That did not happen with you, which is a shame.

While we fundamentally disagree with many of the Trump Administration's policies, I can assure you that Democrats on this Committee are just as committed as our Republican counterparts to keeping our Nation secure while upholding our most important values.

Chairman McCaul has said this Committee, perhaps unlike some others in Congress, prides itself in its ability to come together where we can to enact legislation in the interest of the American people. I agree.

I hope that in the future you will make more of an effort to conduct outreach to Members on this side of the aisle. The American people expect that we engage each other on important issues.

Indeed, this is a critical time for the Department of Homeland Security. America faces threats from the troubling rise of domestic terrorism, mass shootings, and foreign terrorist organizations that seek to do us harm. Russia and other actors are likely to continue their interference in our election systems, including the upcoming midterm elections. Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are still devastated by Hurricanes Maria and Irma, and another hurricane season is just weeks away.

Meanwhile, the Department is dealing with problems of President Trump's own making. His Muslim travel bans, his decision to terminate the DACA program and his Executive Orders on immigration enforcement and border security, which seek to make us a Nation of immigrants no more.

No longer the Department's Chief of Staff, but now its Secretary, its leader, the buck stops

with you. I am concerned, however, that since becoming Secretary you have not always been forthcoming on certain matters.

You testified before the Senate that you do not “specifically remember” whether President Trump used a slur to describe African countries during a White House meeting.

You claimed “I actually do not know that” when asked at that Senate hearing whether Norway is a predominantly Caucasian country, after the President questioned why we could not have more immigrants from Norway.

And, most recently, you declined to explain the President’s tweet referring to a “breeding concept” in “sanctuary cities” in California.

If this is any indication of how you, as Secretary, interact with the White House on homeland security policy matters, there may be cause for concern.

Your recent statements on homeland security matters have been less than encouraging. Based on your press releases this week, you would think the most important homeland security problem facing the Nation is a handful of Central Americans moving through Mexico. That does not make it so.

We know who they are. We know where they are. And we know they generally do not attempt to evade the Border Patrol, but rather present themselves to your agents and officers upon arrival. But fomenting fear about this so-called “caravan” gets airtime on certain media outlets and plays well with elements of President Trump’s political base.

Better to distract the American people from the very real issues facing the Department and perhaps from the President’s own problems too. Likewise, we have heard a lot in recent days about so-called “loopholes” in our immigration system as it relates to children. These are not loopholes.

They are basic humanitarian protections enacted by Congress to protect vulnerable children and ensure that those who have legitimate asylum claims are heard, and those who do not are returned home safely.

We need only look at some of the terrible cases that occurred before this legal framework was implemented to know why Congress acted. Politicizing and demonizing children should be beneath the Department, and Congress must not go down that path.

As you know the mission of the Department of Homeland Security is to “safeguard the American people, our homeland, and our values.” I appreciate this is no easy task, and that we are living in challenging times in more ways than one. I hope that the Department, under your leadership and with over 240,000 employees strong, is up to it.

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