



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Organizational Meeting

September 14, 2016

The Committee is organizing for the 115th Congress at a moment of great anxiety for millions living in America and around the world. At noon on January 20th, Donald J. Trump took the oath of office to become the 45th President of the United States. Within hours of taking the oath, President Trump signed an executive order to begin repealing law that has provided 20 million people health insurance.

On the sixth day in office, he signed an executive order directing DHS to start building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Within a day, that Executive Order, together with talk out of the White House of imposing a 20% tax on Mexican goods to pay for the wall—which is projected to cost \$40 billion—caused the Mexican president to cancel his upcoming meeting with President Trump.

President Trump ended the week by issuing what Former NYC Mayor Rudy Giuliani and most observers have viewed as a “Muslim Ban”. Details are still emerging on how that Executive Order got drafted. Given the disarray that followed at airports in the U.S. and around the world last weekend, I am inclined to believe that this Trump edict—which has significant homeland security, national security, and diplomatic implications—was drafted, in the dark of night, with little or no consultation with the agencies tasked with implementation.

The mishandling of the rollout, where frontline CBP Officers were given conflicting guidance, if any at all, is inexcusable. It put these honorable Americans who are committed to border security in an untenable position—where they had to break up families and detain legal permanent residents – none of whom posed any threat to this country. When it comes to governing, little good can come from advancing uninformed, uncoordinated, unilateral action.

The same can be said for the activities of this Committee. I take great pride in the Committee’s reputation as a bipartisan panel. Looking back at my time on this Committee, I can say that, almost without exception, it was those times when we worked across the aisle that we did the most good.

Mr. Chairman, that is why I am deeply disappointed to see you take a page of President Trump’s book and seek more power to act unilaterally. I am, of course, referring to the proposed Rule III in the package you circulated on Saturday.

Under the new “Special Committee Panels” rule, the Chairman would be granted unilateral authority to establish an ad hoc subcommittee or task force. This is a major departure from the way this Committee has done business since I was Chairman.

In fact, since the 111th Congress, the Committee Rules have required concurrence between the Chairman and Ranking Member to establish such a panel. As I understand it, you took this extreme action after Majority-Minority discussions broke down over establishing a panel to look at terrorist travel to the U.S.

According to the proposal, this panel would consider pathways of undocumented persons, visa waiver travelers, visa travelers, refugees, as well as U.S. citizens, Legal Permanent Residents.

In light of the Trump Muslim Ban, there is a legitimate concern on this side of the aisle that this panel will be a rubber stamp for the draconian and unconstitutional actions that President Trump has ordered. In an effort to guard against such an outcome, we requested that Democrats who serve on this panel be given the same rights that would be afforded to Republicans.

That reasonable request was rejected and, as such, we find ourselves here today considering a heavy-handed Rules package that walks away from eight years of precedent and gives Chairman McCaul new unilateral power.

I will be offering an amendment to restore the standing rule and am hopeful that the Chairman can accept it and come back to the negotiating table. We all have an interest in strengthening border security but Democrats will not stand by and overtly or tacitly endorse the extreme actions of this President.

Before I yield back, I would like to briefly introduce the new Members on the Democratic side. We are pleased to have Representative Lou Correa, a favorite son of Orange County, California, join us on the Committee. He will be bringing his significant legislative experience to the work of the Oversight and Management Efficiency Subcommittee, on which he will serve as the top Democrat.

The Committee is also fortunate to have Val Demings, the former Orlando Florida Police Chief, on our panel. Representative Demings brings over thirty years of law enforcement experience to the table. I am confident that her firsthand knowledge of first responder issues will enhance the quality of our Committee's work.

Finally, at this time when immigration issues are front and center, we are fortunate to have Nannette Barragan on the panel. Her personal story, as the youngest of eleven in a Mexican immigrant family, is one that needs to be shared, particularly when we have a President who repeatedly vilifies Mexican immigrants. We also will be looking to Ms. Barragan, who represents the Port of Long Beach, to bring her knowledge of port security matters to the table.

These three new Members are wonderful additions to the roster that already has strong, smart, and diverse homeland security voices.

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