



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

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

Ending the Crisis: America's Borders and the Path to Security
February 7, 2017

Remarks as Prepared

The Trump Administration has inherited porous borders, failed immigration policies, and a grave and growing terror threat. Two weeks ago, the Trump Administration took action to address these dangers.

First, the President signed an Executive Order for a border security “surge.” Today, we will get an update on that effort and how you plan to create multi-layered defenses to keep criminals, drug cartels, and potential terrorists out of our country. After the Secretary’s testimony, we will welcome a panel of frontline defenders from Texas and Arizona for a frank discussion about the challenges at the local level.

Second, the President signed an Executive Order to put a “pause” on immigration and refugee admissions from high-threat parts of the world. The pause will give us time to enhance security checks to stop terrorists from using our immigration system as a Trojan Horse—as they have already done in Europe.

Last year, I helped to draft a memo to then-candidate Trump explaining how we could intensify the vetting process while ensuring our doors remain open to peaceful, freedom-loving people, regardless of race or religion. I also authored the American SAFE Act, which called for temporarily pausing the Syrian refugee program so we could improve security screening. It passed the House with a bi-partisan veto-proof majority.

I am encouraged the President has paid attention to those recommendations.

But the rollout of his Executive Order has been problematic. It caused confusion here in Congress, across the country, and around the world. And it caused real problems for people with lawful green cards and visas, who in some cases were already in the air when the order was signed.

Secretary Kelly, you and I have spoken about my concerns, and I am reassured that you have taken positive steps to help correct for the order’s deficiencies. Now we will wait to see how the matter is handled in the courts.

In the meantime, let me stress that the words we use about this Executive Order matter. This is not a Muslim ban. And even the suggestion that it is could alienate our allies and embolden our adversaries.

Again, this is a temporary suspension on visas from high-risk terror threat countries and a pause on the refugee program. This will allow the Administration to put in place enhanced vetting to keep terrorists out and keep Americans safe.

These countries were selected because of a law drafted by this Committee, which designated four nations as terror hotspots, including all “state sponsors of terror.”

The Obama Administration later added three additional countries to this list, bringing the total to seven.

That is what the Trump Administration relied on—a law based on risk, not on religion.

I urge my colleagues and the media to avoid reckless statements to the contrary.

Now is the time for DHS to move forward with common-sense, 21st century vetting changes. I hope the Department will follow this Committee’s guidance. We have been more focused than any other panel in Congress on shutting down terrorist pathways into this country.

In 2015, we created a bipartisan task force that conducted one of the widest reviews of security gaps since the 9/11 Commission. That review produced more than 50 recommendations to stop jihadists from entering the United States undetected. Some of these were enacted into law, while others were not. So we need to address them as soon as possible, especially visa and refugee security improvements.

Finally, because of a law drafted by this Committee, the President will be required to submit a “national strategy to combat terrorist travel” to Congress this summer. We look forward to receiving it and reviewing the Trump Administration’s long-term plan for denying jihadists entry into the United States, including at the border.

Americans are eager to see results. Washington’s open-border policies and weak immigration screening have failed our people and our communities time and again. That is why I am pleased we have a “no-nonsense” Secretary of Homeland Security, who is ready to do what others could not by finally securing our territory.

Mr. Secretary, I want to thank you again for joining us today. You are charged with confronting adaptive threats and insidious enemies. And I want you to know that this Committee and this Congress stand ready to work with you to secure America.

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