



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

117th Congress Organizational Meeting

February 3, 2021

I am pleased that the Committee is meeting today to officially kick off our work for the 117th Congress. There is so much work for the Committee to do given that the Department of Homeland Security is a central player in our efforts to address the most pressing national issues before us today!

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. The justification for the creation of DHS is so closely tied to that catastrophic event. Today, DHS has enormous responsibilities well beyond the major task of preventing foreign terrorists from carrying out attacks on U.S. soil.

The growth in terrorist activity by domestic actors—most notably by violent white supremacist extremists and armed militias—poses a clear and present danger to the wellbeing of our nation. We are all still absorbing the horrifying events of January 6th, where nearly a thousand rioters invaded the Capitol in an orchestrated fashion aimed at preventing Congress from carrying out its sacred constitutional role to certify the presidential election. I am proud that notwithstanding that terrorist incursion, we came back and did our job.

I am also proud of the work DHS did in the run up to the 2020 election to ensure that we had the most secure election in American history and its ongoing activities to protect our democracy. In the wake of the attack, it falls to us in this Committee to do oversight into the breakdowns in information sharing before and during that fateful day. For those of us who have been involved in efforts to ensure that Federal, State and local authorities work together to “connect the dots” to prevent terrorist plots—this massive failure is very alarming.

DHS is also a major player in the national effort to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether its supporting States in their efforts to get testing and PPE in the field or standing up vaccination centers, DHS has a central role to play.

Another major responsibility that DHS has is with respect to protecting the Nation’s cyberspace. Last year, when we enacted reforms proposed by the Solarium Commission to improve Federal coordination and response to cyber threats, few of us had ever heard of “Solar Winds.” Today, CISA and its partners are in a race against time to address the damage resulting from this sophisticated and sustained supply chain attack on Federal networks and certain critical infrastructure.

This Congress, it falls to us, as CISA’s authorizers, to not only carry out diligent oversight of CISA’s efforts to assess the exposure of Federal systems and eradicate our adversaries from our networks but also to determine the adequacy of CISA’s authorities and resources to execute this vital mission.

Like I said, the Committee has a lot of important work to do this Congress. Fortunately, this Committee is well-positioned to address all these challenges. We have a great group of Members and, with the support of Speaker Pelosi, we have a “Memorandum of Agreement” with the other House Committees

with jurisdiction over DHS to set the stage for unprecedented collaboration on homeland security legislation.

Without objection, I would like to enter into the record the agreement, which was submitted by Speaker Pelosi into the Congressional Record on January 25, 2021. This agreement is designed to not only help the Committee advance sweeping DHS reform legislation but also ensure that CHS is consulted whenever other Committees are looking to advance component-specific bills.

Turning to today's agenda—prior to today's meeting, I consulted with the Ranking Member on the Committee rules package and staffing resolution. The only substantive change to the Committee rules relates to decorum. Specifically, the rules prohibit anyone from physically attending Committee proceedings or coming into Committee space without properly wearing a mask.

As leaders in homeland security, we owe it to each other and our constituents to be good role models and do the things that the CDC and other public health authorities have asked us to do to keep each other safe and help get COVID-19 under control.

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