



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Protecting America's Democracy: Ensuring Every Vote Counts

August 28, 2020

Before I begin today, I want to extend my deepest sympathies to those who have been affected by the California wildfires and Hurricane Laura. Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast 15 years ago this week. The storm caused horrific damage and upended people's lives. But through perseverance, hard work, and unyielding oversight of the Federal disaster response apparatus, we built back better.

As the residents of communities affected by Hurricane Laura assess the damage to their homes, they can rest assured that this Committee will hold the Federal Emergency Management Agency and its Federal partners accountable by making sure they provide the help communities need to get back on their feet. A key lesson from Hurricane Katrina is that the initial response was hampered by the inept leadership of an inexperienced, unqualified presidential campaign donor who had been appointed to head FEMA, the nation's emergency manager. The Hurricane served as an important reminder that Federal agencies should be led by experienced people - committed to the mission - especially in times of crisis.

Today, the country is in crisis once again, and inept leadership is stalling the nation's response. A global pandemic has crippled the nation since March, dramatically changing how Americans live and work and keeping hundreds of thousands of children out of school. Hurricanes continue to batter coastal communities and wildfires are ravaging the West Coast. In the midst of all this, a Presidential election is rapidly approaching.

During this time of crisis, Americans are depending on the Postal Service to deliver life-saving prescriptions, essential goods, and importantly, their election ballots. The President, however, is waging an attack on the Postal Service to serve his own political interests. For instance, the President has told the public that vote by mail is rigged, illegal, or fraudulent over 100 times since March, undeterred by the fact that he has been contradicted by DHS and the Intelligence Community.

The Administration has refused to provide funding the Postal Service needs to ensure it can continue to deliver for this nation over the long term. The President has openly acknowledged that he is depriving the Postal Service of additional funding because he is concerned that expanding voting opportunities will hurt his re-election chances. To make matters worse, the Postal Service is now being led by a presidential campaign donor who does not even know how much it costs to mail a postcard.

The Postmaster General implemented sweeping operational changes, and the Postal Service's own internal documents confirm these changes have slowed mail service across the country this summer. These changes could slow the delivery of ballots during this fall's election—just as millions of Americans are choosing to vote by mail for the first time to avoid possible exposure to COVID-19.

Although the Postmaster General has since paused his restructuring plan, he has refused to roll back changes that have already been implemented. It is time for the Postmaster General to demonstrate to the American public that he is committed to the mission and fit for the challenges ahead—and that the

Postal Service will do whatever it takes to get election mail delivered on time We cannot afford to have another “heck of a job” moment. More than that, the President must stop peddling disinformation that could suppress voter participation and undermine confidence in election results. It sets a bad tone.

Just yesterday, Michigan’s Secretary of State – who is testifying before us today – alerted voters to a racially charged robocall using lies to discourage minority voters from voting by mail. This must stop. We cannot allow disinformation to divide Americans and destroy our democracy. At the same time, people who prefer to vote in person must have the opportunity to do so safely and securely.

That means, among other things, there must be enough polling places that are easily accessible to all voters, particularly low-income voters who are less able to travel long distances to polling locations. No one should be disenfranchised because it is too hard to get to a polling place or because the line is too long.

Before I close, I want to note that the House passed the HEROES Act in May and the Delivering for America Act last week. Both are essential to our elections this November, and I urge the Senate to act on them.

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