



COMMITTEE *ON* HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

February 28, 2023

I am pleased the Committee is holding its first hearing of the 118th Congress. However, I would note that while Republicans are using this hearing to criticize Secretary Mayorkas for the challenges at our border — challenges, I might add, that go back decades and will never be addressed without fixing our broken immigration system — the Majority has offered no solutions of its own.

Republican Leadership said it would bring a border bill to the House Floor during the first days of the new Congress, but their bill, which would have effectively ended asylum in this country, was so extreme it didn't have the votes to pass and was pulled from the schedule. The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Gonzalez, a Republican Member of this panel who represents a border district, called the bill "anti-American" and "not Christian" — and I agree.

America has long welcomed those coming to our shores seeking protection from persecution, and we are a better Nation for it. Turning our backs on asylees would be turning our backs on who we are as a country. It would also be bad for border security, since having a system for people to apply for asylum helps border management and allows law enforcement to focus on real border security threats.

After failing to deliver the "meaningful" and "ready-to-go" border bill Republican Leadership promised, and still having no plan to address the situation at the border, several committees called hearings like this one today.

Unfortunately, I am concerned that this hearing won't help us move toward a solution for better border management but rather may be used by some as a platform for divisive rhetoric and anti-immigrant fearmongering. I hope that's not the case. We are better than that, or at least we should be.

Instead, we need to look at the facts, and work together toward solutions.

The fact is Democrats are focused on investing in border staffing, infrastructure, and technology, especially at ports of entry, where the vast majority of fentanyl is trafficked. Over 90 percent of fentanyl seizures occur at ports of entry or border checkpoints, and those responsible are overwhelmingly American citizens, not migrants.

The fact is, despite tough talk on border security, Republicans voted against necessary funding, opposing \$7.2 billion for Border Patrol operations, including for hiring; \$65 million for 300 more Border Patrol agents; and \$60 million for additional personnel at ports of entry last year. Certain Members on the other side of the aisle have even suggested defunding the Department of Homeland Security — the very Department that is working to secure our borders. That kind of talk may score political points in certain circles, but it flies in the face of good, old-fashioned common sense.

The fact is the Biden administration is working to deal with the fallout of the prior administration's failed border policies while treating people humanely and with dignity. The administration is implementing a

six-pillar plan for immigration and border security, which includes surging resources, increasing efficiency, imposing consequences for violators, bolstering the capacity of NGO and State and local partners, going after cartels and smugglers, and working with countries in the region.

The administration has also created a new legal pathway for Cubans, Venezuelans, Haitians, and Nicaraguans – who make up almost a third of those currently being encountered at the border – to enter the U.S. on a two-year parole after an application is made and approved. Providing this orderly pathway is already showing results at the border – Border Patrol encounters with nationals of those four countries declined by 95 percent in January.

The fact is the Biden administration is working to reunite hundreds of families who remain separated years after the Trump administration took children from their parents at the border – a policy that will be a permanent stain on our country's conscience.

Certainly, more remains to be done. I believe the solution to our longstanding border challenges is for Congress to finally fix our broken immigration system and expand legal pathways of migration for vetted individuals who want to contribute to our society. Doing so will allow border personnel to focus on real threats to homeland security, put human smugglers out of business, and help ensure migrants are treated with dignity – goals everyone should be able to agree on.

But a question remains: Do we want to finally overcome our border challenges or do people want to use the issue for partisan attacks? I guess we'll see.

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