



COMMITTEE *ON* HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

A Review of the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget for the Department of Homeland Security

April 18, 2023

I want to thank Secretary Mayorkas for being here today to testify at the Committee's annual budget hearing.

The President's fiscal year 2024 budget requests \$103.2 billion for the Department of Homeland Security to carry out its mission of safeguarding the homeland and the American people while preserving our values. The request reflects the needs of the Department given the current threat landscape, with mounting challenges at our borders, increased fentanyl trafficking, primarily by U.S. citizens at ports of entry, persistent cyber threats, growing domestic terrorism, and more frequent and severe natural disasters. It also reflects the state of the Department 20 years after its establishment in the wake of 9/11, and just two years removed from the damage wrought by the Trump Administration.

The Biden Administration inherited a Department of Homeland Security beleaguered by four years of politicization and mismanagement. Among Secretary Mayorkas' predecessors were so-called leaders — often unqualified and sometimes unlawfully appointed — who did the former President's bidding, even if it meant separating small children from their parents, pandering to domestic extremists, and violating Americans' civil rights by detaining peaceful protesters and spying on journalists. One of those predecessors was not only unlawfully appointed, but also refused to testify at the Committee's annual hearing on worldwide threats to the homeland, even defying a subpoena to appear.

Under the Trump Administration, DHS regularly refused to comply with regular congressional oversight, ignoring requests and subpoenas for documents. For the last two years, Secretary Mayorkas has had the difficult task of undoing the damage done by the last Administration, while leading the Department and its more than 260,000 employees through challenging times.

Unfortunately, Republicans seem intent on making a hard job even harder, maybe because they think berating the Secretary will get them their five minutes on Fox. They spend time tweeting about their "accomplishments" during the first 100 days of the 118th Congress and touting the number of television appearances they've made; meanwhile they haven't moved a single bill through this Committee. Not one.

I was dismayed to see that speaking to a group of campaign contributors last week about today's hearing, the Chairman said, "get the popcorn...it's going to be fun." I think that tells Americans all they need to know about the Republican agenda here. They don't want solutions to homeland security challenges; they want a headline or a photo op. They want a political wedge issue and something to talk to their deep-pocketed donors about more than they want to work together to get things done. It's Washington at its worst, and a sad departure from the proud bipartisan history of this Committee.

So today, Democrats want to talk to the Secretary about the issues facing the homeland and how the Department would use the President's budget request to address them.

We want to learn about the proposed border contingency fund and how it would be used to process migrants in an orderly and humane way.

We want to understand how the budget would allow CBP to deploy more technology at ports of entry to identify and interdict fentanyl and other illicit drugs being smuggled across our borders.

We want to discuss what the Department and its partners are doing to stop the southbound flow of American guns that are fueling cartel violence in Mexico.

We also want to hear about the terrorism landscape and how the budget would support the fight against proliferating domestic terrorist threats and persistent foreign terrorist threats.

We want to know how the budget would help strengthen our cyber defenses against adversaries like Russia and China and other malign actors.

We want to know whether FEMA has the resources it needs to respond to the unrelenting pace and scale of disasters in recent years.

And we want to ask how we can support the DHS workforce, help improve morale, and provide better pay and rights for frontline employees. That's the work of a functional Committee on Homeland Security at a budget hearing, and that's what you will hear from the Democratic side of the aisle today.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Secretary Mayorkas for his responsiveness to Congress not just today, but since taking the job over two years ago. The speed at which the Department, under his leadership, has responded to congressional oversight by both Republicans and Democrats is unprecedented in the 20 years I have served on this Committee.

On a personal note, I appreciate the Secretary and FEMA Administrator Criswell being on the ground within hours of an EF-4 tornado striking Mississippi last month, and the President and First Lady visiting shortly thereafter. The tornado devastated parts of my district, and the Department has worked quickly to help provide resources. Communities like those I represent were often ignored in times of need by the last administration. It's good to see that the Biden Administration not only talks the talk on equity in disaster response but is also walking the walk when it matters most. We will be looking for your continued support, Mr. Secretary, as survivors work to get back on their feet as the long recovery process continues.

In closing, I want to note that today marks the 28th anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing, and last week we commemorated the 10th anniversary of the Boston Marathon bombing. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with those who were killed or injured in those tragic attacks and their families. We are grateful to the men and women of the Department of Homeland Security who work every day to help prevent future attacks and keep Americans safe.

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