



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Republican Border Hearing

September 13, 2023

If the title is any indication, the Republican Majority is unfortunately engaging in partisan politics again with today's hearing. It didn't have to be this way.

Throughout this Committee's history, we have tried to work in a bipartisan manner to help combat human trafficking and ensure the Department of Homeland Security protects children and other vulnerable populations.

Last Congress, when I served as Chairman, the Committee worked to enact then-Ranking Member John Katko's *Countering Human Trafficking Act*, which made DHS's Center for Countering Human Trafficking permanent. The Act also increased coordination between DHS components and the Blue Campaign, a national public awareness effort designed to educate law enforcement and the public on recognizing the signs of human trafficking. I was proud to work with Ranking Member Katko on the bill and pleased that every subcommittee Chair and Ranking Member joined us as original cosponsors.

Committee Democrats and Republicans also worked together last Congress to pass Rep. Donald M. Payne, Jr.'s legislation, the *Homeland Security for Children Act*. His legislation requires DHS to include feedback from organizations that represent the needs of children in the Department's strategies, policies, and plans. I was pleased that President Biden signed it into law last year. These are just a couple recent examples of the Committee on Homeland Security's long record of bipartisan cooperation on issues like these.

Unfortunately, the current Republican Majority appears to be turning its back on bipartisan cooperation again. Republicans are trying to advance their illegitimate impeachment agenda, even as the Biden Administration and Secretary Mayorkas work to implement orderly and humane border policies.

Given the hearing title, it's apparently lost on Republicans that it was actually the Trump Administration's border policies that imposed devastating human costs, particularly on families and children. Under the Trump Administration's unconscionable family separation policy, for example, over 5,500 children were taken from their parents at the border. These children suffered irreparable harm. Some have been reunited with their parents. This family was separated for years before being reunited by a Biden administration task force.

Tragically though, hundreds of separated children continue to pay the price for this Trump policy — they remain separated from their parents despite ongoing reunification efforts still today. Not only did the Trump Administration take children from their parents, it expelled unaccompanied children from our country and forced people seeking refuge under our asylum laws to languish in dangerous conditions in Mexico, where many were victimized by cartels, smugglers, and criminals.

Talk about the human costs of border policy – these were very real human costs borne mostly by children, families, and the most vulnerable.

And how do Republicans respond when the Biden administration tries to right the wrongs of the past administration? To protect kids or put policies in place to offer lawful pathways for families fleeing violence and persecution at home? Well, let's take a look at Committee Republicans' social media for an indication.

Just recently, we see them mocking the Biden Administration for hiring someone to work at DHS who actually has experience protecting the rights of children. Republicans also included in their border bill provisions to eliminate protections for children in DHS custody under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and the Flores agreement. Unbelievable.

We must never, ever return to the failed border and immigration policies of the last administration. As Americans, we're better than that. Or at least we should be. While we won't agree on everything, there are places we can and should work together.

Democrats want an orderly, humane border. We just want to do it in a way that upholds our values. We want to stop human trafficking, combat smugglers, and help those suffering from the scourge of opioid addiction.

If Republican leadership would stop letting the most extreme MAGA wing of its party call the shots, maybe we could work toward that, together. For the sake of our Committee, this Congress, and the American people, I hope so.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978