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

Examining the Domestic Terrorism Threat in the Wake of the Attack on the U.S. Capitol

February 4, 2021

Today the Committee is meeting to examine the threat of domestic terrorism in the wake of the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6. I would like to start by thanking the men and women of the U.S. Capitol Police, National Guard, Secret Service, Metropolitan Police Department, and all other law enforcement agencies that worked to keep us safe that day and in the days since.

I also want to take a moment to remember Officer Brian Sicknick, who lost his life in the line of duty, and other members of law enforcement who responded to the attack who have tragically passed away. Several others tragically lost their lives during the domestic terrorism attack on our Nation, incited by the former President and his enablers seeking to overturn the results of a legitimate election.

As Members of this Committee are keenly aware, this act of terrorism was not an isolated incident. During the 116th Congress, the Committee held 11 hearings that looked at various domestic terrorism threats. Over a year ago, FBI Director Wray sat before us and warned that domestic terrorism cases were at an all-time high, with racially motivated violent extremists posing the greatest threat.

Then in July 2020, we received testimony from domestic terrorism expert J.J. MacNab that cautioned, and I quote, “that the upcoming election will spark one or more violent events if the president loses his re-election bid...[his supporters] want him to continue and they have talked about Civil War now for years if he does not.”

Last September Director Wray testified again before us saying that racially motivated violent extremists make up the largest portion of domestic terrorist cases that his agents are investigating. Then in October, just four months before the attack on the Capitol, the Department of Homeland Security’s threat assessment identified racially motivated violent extremists—specifically white supremacist extremists—as “the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland.”

Today, we will begin to shed light on why these warnings were not heeded. The irrefutable fact is that the threat of right-wing and more specifically, white nationalist terrorism has been growing for years. The previous Administration failed to address this threat appropriately, and on January 6th we saw the result right here at the U.S. Capitol. I witnessed the events unfold firsthand from my view in the House Gallery, where we had gathered to observe the counting of the electoral votes as required by the Constitution.

I am hopeful that the Biden Administration will work to do a better job of confronting this threat, which has been allowed to fester and even encouraged in recent years. Already, DHS has taken action as the Department issued a rare warning last week about the heightened threat from domestic terrorism. I look forward to engaging newly confirmed Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas on this critical issue.

President Biden also tasked the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, DHS, and FBI with conducting a comprehensive assessment of the threat. I commend this swift action. I also urge the Administration to also prioritize the report on domestic terrorism required by the “Domestic and International Terrorism DATA Act,” which is now seven months past due.

As Members of the Homeland Security Committee – we too have our work cut out for us in Congress. This Committee held 11 hearings last Congress on the threat of domestic terrorism, but clearly much more remains to be done. And during a time in which “both sides-ism” run rampant through our politics, I implore Members of this Committee to follow the threats – wherever they may lead. Any denial or attempt to distract from the threat at hand won’t help us address the problem – that many have been and continue to sound the alarm about.

These conversations will be difficult, and they should be. This threat has long plagued and preyed on the most vulnerable in our society. But we must work together to find solutions – our democracy and American lives are at stake.

Today, we have a panel of expert witnesses that will outline the domestic terror threat as it stands, identify what was missed prior to January 6, and present what we ought to do moving forward. I look forward to their testimony and their responses to our questions so we can find a path to keep us all safe.

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