



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Markup of: H.R. 2794

April 26, 2023

I don't think it's unfair to say that the Committee on Homeland Security has gotten off to an extremely rough start in the 118th Congress.

First, Committee Republicans adopted an oversight plan that left out what national security officials tell us is one of the biggest threats confronting the homeland: domestic terrorism. Then, the full Committee held a hearing with a witness who had said those who invaded the Capitol on January 6th, 2021, were, "very loving Christian people." And a subcommittee invited as a witness a representative of an organization designated as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

And of course, we all saw what happened last week when our constitutional obligation to conduct oversight over DHS was hijacked by vile slander.

Now, months into this Congress, at our first legislative markup, do we have a series of bipartisan bills that could pass the House and become law?

Do we have any measures that would lower the temperature or dial down the rhetoric?

Are we considering bipartisan bills that would make our nation more secure?

Are we considering a bipartisan bill to tackle the fentanyl crisis in this country?

Do we have a bill to stop the cartels?

Unfortunately, not.

Instead, we are presented with a measure that was tailor-made by the MAGA Republican extremists and Republican moderates behind closed doors for the sole purpose of political messaging—without any Democratic input, without input from the Department or even CBP.

Let me be plain. The bill before us today stands no chance of becoming law, especially after it is attached to its cousin—the anti-immigration bill that the Judiciary Committee debated into the wee hours last Wednesday. For such a high priority, you would think the Majority would get technical feedback from the professionals doing the job. But no one outside of the Republican Party saw the text of this bill until 9:44 on Monday morning. That's just under the wire ... the bare minimum amount of time required under our Committee rules. That's just not how we've done things around here. That's not how we should do things.

But procedural considerations aside, this bill is far from meticulous craftsmanship. H.R. 2794 is profoundly immoral. It would sow chaos at the border by essentially shutting down the asylum process, does nothing to build the capacity of CBP to respond to fentanyl smuggling at ports of entry, and blocks nonprofit partners from providing support services to noncitizens—even those here legally. Yet, Republicans found space in this bill to play political games by attacking DHS for its handling of COVID-19 and blocking DHS from spending money on electric vehicles.

On top of that, this bill never misses an opportunity to call fellow human beings “aliens.” At a time when the “Great Replacement Theory” is fueling violence against people of color, such language only reinforces an us-versus-them mentality that is both un-American and un-Christian. We are commanded to welcome the stranger, yet this bill would do anything but call the vulnerable seeking asylum in the greatest country on Earth children of God.

And of course, to make sure the single most important person in the Republican Party is satisfied, this bill restarts construction of a wall that the Chief of the Border Patrol has said is unnecessary. “I do not believe in a wall from sea to shining sea,” Chief Ortiz told this Committee in March.

Like I said, we know from the media that Republican leaders want to pair this measure with another one marked up in the Judiciary Committee last week. So, what would these bills taken together mean for immigration and border security?

First, these bills would make asylum totally unworkable. These bills make it so migrants can only claim asylum at ports of entry. Yet, this bill works to dismantle capacity at ports of entry, including by shutting down the use of CBP One, an app which has helped make the asylum process more orderly. It is not a perfect system, but it has helped migrants safely seek shelter in the U.S. and avoid the dangers of being trafficked by cartels and smugglers between ports of entry. In fact, CBP One is credited for a major reduction in the number of border encounters with individuals from Cuba, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Why would politicians want to take this valuable tool away from those successfully using it in the field?

I also cannot understand why the bill purposefully ignores needs at our ports of entry which, of course, are the frontlines of the battle against fentanyl. Successive Administrations have acknowledged that the bulk of fentanyl entering the country is coming through the United States’ front door—not between ports of entry.

Finally, section 16 of this bill shamefully links nongovernmental organizations to human trafficking and drug smuggling when CBP heavily relies on its partnership with faith-based and other humanitarian groups to support them in caring for asylum seekers. Specifically, H.R. 2794 would prohibit DHS funding to any nonprofit that provides services for noncitizens who have entered the United States legally or not. If this nonsensical provision were to become law, a hospital in New York would be ineligible for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program because it provides medical care to a tourist from Europe.

Let that sink in.

Today, Democrats will offer our Republican colleagues an opportunity to defend their indefensible policies while offering them opportunities to do better. Democrats will offer amendments that would improve CBP hiring and retention, improve support to the frontline law enforcement workforce at DHS, and address some of the root causes of migration.

My colleagues and I will address real issues at the southwest border, like the outbound trafficking of firearms too easily acquired in the United States.

Finally, we must acknowledge how inadequate any border security bill will be in the absence of comprehensive immigration reform. Until Republicans get serious about fixing a broken system that leaves us less competitive in a global economy and less secure at home, we will be here again real soon.

Mr. Chairman, after last week, I had hoped that Committee Republicans would return to the days when this Committee was engaged in the serious task of working in a bipartisan way to make the nation more secure. If this bill is any indication, I fear those days are gone.

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