



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Organizational Meeting for the 119th Congress

January 22, 2025

I want to share my condolences to U.S. Border Patrol Agent David Maland's family and those serving along the northern border. Our hearts go out to Agent Maland's family and all the agents of the Swanton Sector especially.

I also want to give my heartfelt condolences to all those who have been impacted by the devastating wildfires across Southern California, particularly in the Los Angeles area. As we sit here today, first responders in these communities continue to address the effects of some of the worst fires in California history amid extremely challenging conditions, and we all owe them immense gratitude.

At a time when so many are suffering, top Republicans in Congress are considering imposing conditions on disaster aid, following false claims by the President that California "mishandled" the situation. This is no time to play politics with the lives and well-being of those in need.

Without question, Congress should come together to ensure that help reaches those who need it most. I hope my colleagues on this Committee will set an example for how we come together to do the right thing for communities hurt by these fires and other disasters.

The politicization of disaster relief comes amid the new administration's chaotic purges of DHS personnel and policy reversals, which jeopardize our domestic security and standing abroad. While these actions have been telegraphed for months, the scale of the lawlessness and disregard for basic human decency still shocks the conscience—or at least it should.

In just their first hours in power, the new administration shamefully put back on the streets hundreds of dangerous domestic terrorists guilty of assaulting police and obstructing the peaceful transfer of power after the 2020 Presidential election. So much for "Backing the Blue."

The Trump administration has abandoned our allies in Afghanistan, leaving in limbo more than 1,600 vulnerable refugees already cleared for entry into the United States by canceling their flights to the country. Many of these Afghans bravely helped American and allied forces fight Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, and now their lives are jeopardized.

This Committee was formed in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and we should stand up for our allies who have fought terrorism abroad.

The new administration has also implemented loyalty tests for Federal workers and ended programs designed to ensure the Federal workforce resembles the constituents they serve. Loyalty to a President is not a qualification for civil service. Homeland security is far too serious for such silly political games.

As we observed at the start of this meeting, just on Monday, Border Patrol Agent David Maland was shot and killed during a routine traffic stop in Vermont—a tragedy that underscores how competent leadership and stability matters at the third-largest Federal department.

Protecting the Department’s workforce and ensuring competency and stability within DHS leadership should be where this Committee can add value and legislate in a bipartisan fashion. We have done so in the past.

But sadly, the Committee’s legislative productivity declined **40 percent** last Congress compared to the prior Congress under Democratic leadership. Republicans allowed just eight Democratic bills to reach the House floor under suspension of the rules—just one of those became a law. Nor did the Republican agenda fare better.

Aside from waging the failed impeachment of Secretary Mayorkas, Committee Republicans advanced only nine standalone Public Laws themselves, and half of those did not see any Committee consideration prior to floor action. So, nine is a bit of grade inflation. Only at the end of last year did Committee Republicans start to advance legislation, but by then, it was too late for those measures to go further in the legislative process.

I hope we can turn that dismal record around this Congress, but I have my doubts given the prospect of an ultra-partisan reconciliation bill that promises to be like a Christmas tree of the most extreme policies folks like Stephen Miller can dream up.

It is particularly unfortunate for our new Committee Members that I must set expectations so low. But I have seen the dysfunction of government under sole control of Republicans before. I know the pain and suffering that is about to happen. The wild return to the failed policies of the past during the last 46 hours is just the start.

I will just end by saying that the folks who sent us here deserve more than the political theater we saw last Congress. DHS has a wide range of critical missions that demand our attention. As I said last Congress, we owe it to our constituents to work together and remain vigilant regarding the full range of security challenges we face, including those emanating from within our borders.

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[Media contact](#)