



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Oversight, Management, & Accountability Subcommittee Chairman Lou Correa (D-CA)

20 Years After 9/11: Transforming DHS to Meet the Homeland Security Mission

September 30, 2021

This month, we commemorate 20 years since the tragic 9/11 terrorist attacks, which led to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and this Committee. As we look back on the last two decades, it's impossible to ignore how much has changed. The threats our homeland faces today have grown beyond foreign terrorists to include cyber-attacks, climate change, and domestic violent extremism.

To meet these new and existing threats, the Department of Homeland Security has evolved as well. A Department that was once barely more than a collection of 22 disparate Federal agencies has matured to become more cohesive and therefore more effective. But ensuring the Department's many components work in tandem is a daily effort and there is still much progress to be made.

Over the years, several Secretaries of Homeland Security have made it a priority to unify the Department and to consolidate management functions within a strong, centralized headquarters. Many DHS components existed as independent agencies for decades before the Department was created, and each had their own distinct histories and cultures. Although these agencies had been brought together under one umbrella, they didn't always function as one cohesive Department. And DHS headquarters often lacked the ability to adequately coordinate policies, resources, and oversight of the Department as a whole. But significant improvements have been made. DHS has created new offices to better coordinate information sharing, strategic planning, and overlapping operations.

Today, I look forward to hearing from two representatives of DHS's Management Directorate about how the Department has evolved over the last 20 years and how it is tackling ongoing and new challenges. I also look forward to hearing from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), which has provided consistent oversight over the Department since its creation, particularly through its biennial High-Risk List -- a report which identifies government operations with significant vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement.

When DHS was first created, GAO added "Implementing and Transforming the New Department of Homeland Security" to its High-Risk List. In 2003, GAO noted that such a task was an "enormous undertaking that will take time to achieve in an effective and efficient manner." But that failure to do so would "expose the nation to potentially very serious consequences." DHS has transformed itself over the last nearly 20 years, and its designation on the High-Risk List has changed as well.

Now, GAO's recommendations are more narrowly focused on improving the Department's management functions. Because although DHS has made significant progress over the years, it continues to struggle with integrating and strengthening the core functions that affect every single aspect of the agency. This includes the management of information technology, human capital, acquisition, and finances, all of which are housed within the Department's Management Directorate. They remain on the list in many ways because they are the issues that suffer the most from a decentralized headquarters. The constant

push and pull between operational components and headquarters have hampered the Department's ability to develop a strong and unified approach to these core issues.

But tackling these problems is key to ensuring that DHS can continue to protect the Homeland from all threats, those we faced 20 years ago and those we may face in the future. I look forward to hearing more about how DHS has grown into the agency it is today as well as how we can help them continue to mature and meet these enduring challenges.

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