



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Oversight, Investigations & Accountability Subcommittee Ranking Member Shri Thanedar (D-MI)

Invasion of the Homeland: How China is Using Illegal Marijuana to Build a Criminal Network Across America

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If you take a stroll through D.C.'s neighborhoods, you're likely to encounter the National Guard planting flowers or picking up trash, and Federal agents making traffic stops. This supposed crackdown on crime has also played out in Los Angeles, is unfolding in Chicago, and soon coming to Memphis.

Trump's occupation of America's largest city is reducing the Federal government's ability to pursue serious, complex crimes. HSI agents have paused pursuing human traffickers. DEA agents are not uncovering drug rings. And FBI agents stopped investigating financial fraud. Instead, they issue citations for open containers of alcohol, fare evasion, and traffic offenses. These same Federal agents who investigate money laundering and organized crime are also being deployed to Home Depot parking lots to arrest migrants looking for work.

Who is investigating the thousands of illegal marijuana farms that currently exist in this country? And I'm not talking about someone who is growing a handful of pot plants consistent with their State's laws and regulations. I'm referring to marijuana that is being grown by organized crime in our Federal forests, business districts, and suburban neighborhoods—perhaps even at the house next door.

These illegal grow sites are run by Mexican cartels, Cuban drug traffickers, and increasingly, Chinese organized crime. Just a few months ago, in my home State of Michigan, local law enforcement arrested four Chinese Nationals after discovering over 5,000 marijuana plants, worth around \$5 million, in a warehouse.

The billions of dollars in proceeds from illegal marijuana help finance China's Belt and Road Initiative—a plan to wrestle global influence away from the United States through foreign investment in developing nations that the Trump administration has cut aid to. The illegal marijuana proceeds also fuel Mexican cartels that traffic deadly fentanyl to the United States. The marijuana black market is riddled with human trafficking, human smuggling, and forced labor.

All too often, migrants are lured to farms with the promise of decent work. Once they arrive, their identification is taken, and they are forced to work 16 hours a day and live in substandard conditions.

Illegal marijuana cultivation sites are also stealing our scarce resources, such as water and electricity, while poisoning public lands with banned toxic chemicals and pesticides. Illegal marijuana farms are a threat to our national security, human rights, and the environment. The Federal government has had some successes through the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF).

For example, in January 2024, a Federal jury found two Chinese Nationals guilty of possessing and distributing marijuana. Over a seven-month period they shipped 56,000 pounds of marijuana from

Oklahoma to the East Coast. In June 2024, the Justice Department charged associates of Mexico's Sinaloa drug cartel for conspiring with groups linked to Chinese underground banking to launder drug trafficking proceeds. Despite these wins and others, the Trump Administration has proposed eliminating funding for OCEETF.

I am leery that OCEETF is being replaced with Homeland Security Task Forces that will further elevate immigration enforcement at the expense of other law enforcement missions, including those best suited to tackle illegal marijuana. The multi-faceted threats posed by illegal marijuana farms run by organized crime require a coordinated national strategy and the resources to carry out that strategy.

I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about the resources required of the Federal government to snuff out illegal marijuana.

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