



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Full Committee Markup of H.R. 1232, 1433, 1589, 1590, 1593, 1598, 1639

March 13, 2019

Last week, Rep. Torres Small, the Chairwoman of our Oversight, Management and Accountability Subcommittee, held her first Subcommittee hearing on hiring challenges within Customs and Border Protection. This week, I am pleased we are addressing the Committee's oversight findings with two measures, H.R. 1598, the *CBP Rural and Remote Hiring and Retention Strategy Act* and H.R. 1639, the *CBP Workload Staffing Model Act*, as introduced by Mr. Higgins.

We also will be considering H.R. 1232, a bill introduced by our leader on the Border Security Subcommittee, Representative Rice, to rein in Executive overreach by the Trump Administration to deliver on the President's dream of a border wall along the southwest border.

The Secretary of Homeland Security has had authority since 2005 to waive "all legal requirements" to build border barriers. Prior to 2017, this waiver authority was invoked five times—all during the Bush Administration—and what resulted was tragic.

In 2008, a rain storm in the city of Nogales, Arizona, which was built on a floodplain, resulted in catastrophic damage because a storm run-off channel was blocked by a five-foot-tall concrete barrier that DHS built without having to give any consideration to Federal, State, or local environmental or zoning laws. The border barrier prevented stormwater from reaching a water treatment center and placed such pressure on underground pipes that it resulted in a ten-foot-sinkhole that caused upwards of \$8 million in damage to downtown Nogales.

To date, the Trump Administration has issued six blanket waivers for border zones in California, Texas, and New Mexico. H.R. 1232 would prevent the current and future Administrations from putting border communities at risk by revoking this waiver authority and forcing DHS to follow the law, if it wants to build new wall or border barriers.

On a related note, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that the Trump Administration transmitted its budget request for Fiscal Year 2020 earlier this week. It doubles down on the President's single-minded focus on getting his border wall built.

To free up an additional \$8.6 billion for his wall, the President wants to make draconian cuts to programs such as Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare. This would imperil the lives and welfare of our constituents and, I, for one, will not stand for it.

Turning to today's business, in addition to border security legislation, the Committee will be considering H.R. 1433, the *DHS MORALE Act*, that would put in place important workforce reforms to start to meaningfully tackle the Department's morale problem. The 2018 "Best Places to Work in the Federal Government Survey" put the satisfaction of DHS' workforce dead last among Large Federal agencies and Departments. Given how much DHS spends to recruit, on-board, and train its workforce, the morale crisis within DHS cannot be ignored.

Additionally, I am pleased that today we will be considering a measure to improve DHS' efforts to bolster preparedness and response to school security incidents. We are considering H.R. 1593, the *CLASS Act*, legislation from the Chairman of the Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery Subcommittee, Mr. Payne.

The other two measures on the agenda, introduced by Representatives Guest and Walker respectively, are also timely and would help enhance preparedness and response to the emerging threats of returning foreign fighters and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear attack plots.

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