



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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

The Way Forward on Border Security

March 6, 2019

I would note it has been nearly a year since the Secretary of Homeland Security testified before this Committee. A great deal has happened in that time. The Department of Homeland Security separated thousands of children from their parents at the border. Two small children died in the Department's custody. The President shut down the Federal government over demands for more taxpayer money for a border wall. And most recently, the President declared a nonexistent "emergency" at the border because Congress would not capitulate to his funding demands.

Clearly, oversight of the Trump Administration's border policy is long overdue. Under my Chairmanship, the days of lax oversight of the Department by this Committee are over.

With the hope of informing our hearing discussion, on January 4, 2019, I wrote to Secretary Nielsen asking for documents related to the border wall, the Department's interference with asylum seekers at ports of entry, separation of families at the border, and treatment of children in their custody. More than two months later, the Committee has only received a handful of the requested documents. This is unacceptable.

The Committee needs this information for its oversight, and the Department's failure to provide it raises further questions about this Administration's credibility. Let me be clear – I am prepared to use the tools at the Committee's disposal to obtain the information if the Secretary fails to comply.

Today, we will look at what the Administration has said and done about border security and line it up against the facts. When it comes to border security, what the American people have heard from the Trump Administration is misleading at best.

The Secretary has said the Administration had no policy to separate children from their parents, but internal memoranda make clear she was aware the Administration's policy would require families to be separated. No amount of verbal gymnastics will change that she knew the Trump Administration was implementing policy to separate families at the border. To make matters worse, the Administration bungled implementation of its cruel plan, losing track of children and even deporting parents to Central America without their children. The Department also began limiting lawful asylum seekers presenting themselves at ports of entry, driving desperate families into more remote parts of the border and overwhelming border personnel and resources in those areas. Tragically, two young children died when they became ill in custody.

Shortly thereafter, the President shut down the government and declared a border "emergency" – an emergency that does not exist – to get more funding for a wall. The President himself admitted there is no emergency, even as he was announcing his declaration, saying "I didn't need to do this. I just want to do it faster." The President wants to build a wall so there is something to point to, or have his picture taken in front of, to convince the American people he has border security figured out.

Real border security cannot be achieved by building a wall on the southern border, blocking asylum seekers, or separating children from their parents. These things are simplistic solutions that may have political appeal for some but offer little security value, if any. Indeed, focusing on the southern border to the exclusion of threats elsewhere undermines homeland security.

Today, the Secretary can choose whether to be complicit in this Administration's misinformation campaign, or she can correct the record and start a serious discussion about the way forward on border security. For the sake of our country, I urge her to choose the latter.

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