



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Full Committee Markup

March 7, 2018

Today, the Committee is considering eleven bills. While I do not have any major concerns with the measures on the roster, I am profoundly disappointed that this Committee is not showing leadership on one of the most significant threats our nation faces—the threat to our election systems.

Yesterday marked the start of the 2018 Federal election cycle, with your home state completing its primary. When it comes to protecting our democracy from interference by Vladimir Putin’s hackers, we do not have a moment to waste. The Intelligence Community has spoken with a unified voice about this homeland security threat. In fact, last month six intelligence agency chiefs issued a dire warning about the Kremlin’s ongoing efforts to influence the U.S. elections.

Even though you have written to me that you recognize the severity of the threat, I am disappointed that you have failed to exercise leadership by not holding a single hearing on election security. And while we both know that this threat is real, all you have said you are willing to do is allow Committee Members to question the new Secretary of Homeland Security about it at a budget hearing that has not even been noticed. You and I both know that a budget hearing with the Secretary of Homeland Security is not a forum for a focused discussion on this critical issue.

Further, I wrote to you to request that this Committee take urgent action and mark up H.R. 5011, the “Election Security Act,” a bill cosponsored by over 60 Members of Congress, including all the Democrats on this Committee. The Election Security Act is a product of the Congressional Task Force on Election Security, a forward-looking initiative that recently issued an oversight report with wide-ranging recommendations to protect election security.

I strongly believe that this Committee is duty-bound to act on H.R. 5011, not only to uphold our obligations to our constituents, but also to carry out our responsibilities under the Rules of the House of Representatives. For that matter, pursuant to Rule Ten, we owe a duty to the House to come together, on a bipartisan basis, to force Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to answer for his failure to spend any of the \$120 million we earmarked for efforts to counter foreign meddling in our elections.

Last week, the head of the U.S. Cyber Command testified before Congress that he

had not been directed by the Trump Administration to go after the Russian attackers.

Yesterday, the Director of National Intelligence evaded Senators' questions about whether the White House has specifically directed him to address the Russian threat. The DNI stated that there is no "coherent strategy" to address Russian interference. It seems as if the Trump Administration and this Committee, under your leadership, are putting the same amount of effort towards this indisputable homeland security threat— none whatsoever.

While I am disappointed that the Committee missed an opportunity to address election security today, I am pleased that the Committee is considering three bills that would bolster homeland security in a meaningful way.

Authored by the Vice Ranking Member, Ms. Watson Coleman, H.R. 5131, the "Surface Transportation Security Improvements Act of 2018," seeks to significantly enhance the Department's efforts to protect surface transportation systems. It does so by driving DHS to, among other things, ensure that terrorism risks associated with surface transportation receive needed attention in DHS' resource allocation process, engage with surface transportation operators about their unmet security funding needs, and explore integrating innovative processes and technologies into surface transportation operations.

The second measure, H.R. 5089, the "Strengthening Local Transportation Security Capabilities Act of 2018," was introduced by Ms. Barragan to enhance the ability of local officials and responders to respond to a transportation security incident such as a vehicle-borne attack on commuters or an active shooter situation like LAX experienced in 2013.

I authored the third measure, H.R. 4176, the "Air Cargo Security Improvement Act of 2018," to ensure that TSA is positioned to address the evolving threats to air cargo. The air cargo-based terrorist plot that Australian authorities thwarted this summer was a wake-up call for greater, more focused attention on air cargo security within TSA. As the author of the landmark 9/11 Commission Act, it has been disappointing to see an erosion in focus on air cargo within TSA since publishing its air cargo security rule in 2009. Enactment of H.R. 4176 should make TSA respond more effectively to emerging threats to air cargo security.

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