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

Full Committee Markup

March 8, 2017

Today's markup, in some ways, feels like "de ja vu." Since last Congress, this Committee has worked on a bipartisan basis to advance an unprecedented number of measures to the Full House and we are poised to continue that record today.

We cannot ignore, however, that a lot has changed since the election. Sitting in the Oval Office is a man who made his name in politics by promoting a conspiracy theory that President Obama was not born in the United States, and since taking office has doubled-down on trafficking in lies to bolster his ego and deflect from embarrassing missteps.

In tweet after tweet, this President has adopted a "shoot first, ask questions later" mentality. He pedals falsehoods that, wittingly or not, undermine our democracy and diminish our nation's moral legitimacy.

First, there were his unsubstantiated claims that three to five million people voted illegally in the 2016 election - a charge he directed Vice President Pence to investigate after making the claim.

Then, this past Saturday after feeling the heat over mounting evidence that his associates had repeated contacts with individuals associated with the Putin government, the President engaged in another early morning Twitter tirade, tweeting -- "Terrible! Just found out that Obama had my 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower just before the victory. Nothing found. This is McCarthyism!" Seemingly to give his baseless claim credibility, the President has asked Congress to investigate, though he has yet to furnish evidence on where he got his information.

One thing we do know is that it was probably not from the FBI or ODNI since the officials that would have been involved have both indicated that this claim is baseless. They don't call baseless allegations "Trumped" up charges for nothing. In the meantime, while Vice President Pence and Congress scurry to investigate "Trumped" up charges, this Administration has, not so quietly, up-ended our border and immigration systems in cruel and unjustifiable ways.

As much as we focus on the talk inside the Beltway, President Trump's efforts to fulfill his arbitrary campaign promises are affecting folks all across the country – and have

hit home for me in recent weeks.

Remember the name Daniela Vargas. Up until a few days ago, when ICE officers pulled her over on the way back from a DACA rally, she had been living in my community. Today, Daniela is confined to a detention center in Louisiana, where she awaits deportation to a country she has not stepped foot in since she was 7 when her parents brought her to the United States.

Daniela is not a criminal or danger to our community. To the contrary, she was a straight A student with dreams of a career, where she could give back to the country that has given her so much. ICE is stonewalling me and others, in the hopes that we will look away.

But we will not. We will not look away when the President erects barriers between nations—be it a border wall with Mexico or a Muslim ban on foreign travelers. We will not look away from what we are hearing about the first budget submission for DHS, which will slash funding for first responders, the Coast Guard and myriad of other critical homeland security priorities to fund the President's misguided immigration and border plans.

While long-term acquisition plans for the Department or TSA are a good thing, as called for in two of the measures to be considered today, we cannot turn a blind eye to the bigger picture. The uncertainty and significant fluctuations in DHS' budget undermine the Department's ability to not only carry out its current activities but plan.

That said, we have an obligation, in this Committee to provide guidance to the Department. The fourteen measures to be considered today do just that. I look forward to advancing these measures in a bipartisan fashion.

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