



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)
Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry into the United States
Denying Terrorists Entry to the United States: Examining Visa Security
May 3, 2017**

In the past, terrorists have exploited legitimate channels of travel to the United States from countries around the globe with the intention of harming our country.

I am a firm believer that it is imperative that we work together in a bipartisan way to assure the American people that we have the right policies in place to prevent terrorists from traveling to our country.

As the Committee continues to examine the homeland security implications of terrorist travel, it is important to revisit the facts that have led to the creation this Task Force.

During the Committee's 115th Organizational Meeting in February, Chairman McCaul was granted unilateral authority to establish this Task Force by this Committee's Republican Members.

As I stated at the Organizational Meeting, this was a major departure from the way this Committee has done business.

Since the 110th Congress, the Committee Rules have required concurrence between the Chairman and Ranking Member to establish such a panel. However, the Chairman ignored the concerns of the Democratic Members and strongly lamented of the need for this six month Task Force beyond the work of our current subcommittees.

On February 24, 2017, the Task Force was announced with the statement that it would, beginning in March 2017, "examine all pathways by which extremists might infiltrate the homeland and will seek to identify gaps in U.S. government information sharing and vetting procedures."

Yesterday, May 2, 2017, marked the first Member activity for the Task Force. Since February, the issues of oversight for this task force have changed dramatically.

Proposed topics of oversight have included: pathways of undocumented persons, visa waiver travelers, visa travelers, refugees, as well as U.S. citizens, and Legal Permanent

Residents.

Most recently, the Committee Chairman seems to have narrowed the focus of the Task Force, announcing its main purpose would be “a review of the Government’s implementation of the Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act enacted by the 114th Congress...”

So, rather than examining “all pathways” terrorists could travel to the U.S., it appears the Task Force will primarily focus on the Visa Waiver Program and, specifically, the implementation of the new Act.

I want to be clear, in recent years, the Committee on Homeland Security has held several hearings to discuss terrorist travel and related U.S. government programs aimed at visa security, traveler screening, and the security of the VWP, including the threat posed by potential terrorists who hold western passports that might allow them to come to the U.S. without a visa.

Throughout this time, Democratic Members have supported appropriate security enhancements to the visa process and the VWP, while upholding our values as a Nation of immigrants.

In fact, all of our Members by way of the Full Committee and all of our subcommittees, but especially the Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee, have conducted thorough and exhaustive oversight of the Visa Waiver Program.

So as we gather here today, more than three months after a sense of urgency was expressed and years of bipartisan Committee practice were abolished, I am unsure of the true purpose, needs, and goals of this Task Force.

Further, I remain concerned that this task force, which was created in the aftermath of the Trump Muslim Ban, may be used to provide a rubber stamp for the draconian and unconstitutional actions that President Trump has ordered.

Going forward, I hope that work of this Task Force will become more focused so that we can provide substantive oversight of attempted terrorist travel to the United States.

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