



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

***Full Committee Markup***

**July 24, 2018**

Today's markup comes at a disturbing moment in our nation's history. Last Monday, we saw a historic spectacle of an American President standing before a world audience, gleefully accepting Vladimir Putin's weak denial that he did not direct an attack on our democracy.

Remarkably, despite having the benefit of seeing both the IC's evidence proving that election interference was Kremlin-driven and the indictment of 12 Russian intelligence officers, President Trump acquiesced to the Russian President.

Ever since that day, the White House has been executing an all-out campaign to try and erase the memory of what we saw and heard, even as the President puts out the welcome mat for Putin to visit in the fall.

Suffice is to say, the campaign is not working. Instead, public sentiment is cementing around the view that the Mueller investigation must run its course to help answer what is behind the President's behavior towards Russia.

The Trump Administration is also unsuccessfully trying to erase its responsibility to reunify thousands of children who were taken from their parents by CBP as a result of the President's ill-conceived and cruel "zero tolerance" border policy.

It is an outrage that the same Administration that created this humanitarian crisis is now arguing in the courts that it should not have to reunify children with parents that it deported.

This posture is all the more outrageous when you consider the substantial evidence that many of the parents that voluntarily withdrew their asylum claims and agreed to be deported only did so after being advised by DHS officials that it would help expedite a reunion with their children.

Last week, Members of this Committee sat for two and half hours with officials from the Departments of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, and Justice and were fed excuse after excuse for why these children are still in Federal custody.

Today, with consideration of House Resolution 1005, Members of this panel will have the opportunity to send a message to the Department of Homeland Security about our grave concern regarding how "zero tolerance" was rolled out and the damage it has done to

vulnerable people fleeing violence.

We must address family separation as well as the tactics that CBP is employing to interfere with the ability of people to exercise their legal rights to seek asylum at a port of entry.

We must, as a co-equal branch of government, do our part and demand accountability from DHS.

Today, with the consideration of my Resolution and an amendment to be offered by Representative Barragan, we can do just that.

What we should not be doing here today is permanently authorizing the BITMAP program, which ICE continues to operate as a pilot, but whose efficacy as a counterterrorism program is unknown.

Though the Trump Administration credits the program with identifying “many known terrorists,” the little data that has been furnished to the Committee, which is law enforcement sensitive, does not validate this assertion.

Further, the timing is particularly troubling since under BITMAP, partner countries collect biometric and biographical data from fleeing migrants as they transit through their countries, to be shared with the U.S.

Many of these migrants are the same people who, upon arriving in the U.S., had their children taken away by our government.

Of the 13 bills before us today, I support positively reporting all but the BITMAP bill.

Before I yield back, I just want to take a moment to talk about H.R. 5869, a bill to analyze the threats facing our maritime border. Though I do not believe the sponsor intends to do so, I am sensitive to the possibility that this bill could be used to launch unintended attacks against the Jones Act.

As such, I would like to clarify for the record that the intent of the bill is to look at threats of terrorism and criminal activity and what is needed for effective border security.

On a related note, I would like to submit a report in the record that has been called “the first fact-based, comprehensive report” on the Jones Act since Hurricanes Irma and Maria struck the island. Importantly, it found that “the Jones Act does not increase the price of consumer goods in Puerto Rico.”

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