

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bonnie Watson Coleman

Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry into the United States

Denying Terrorists Entry to the United States: Examining Visa Security

May 3, 2017

I welcome the opportunity to work with you and our colleagues on the Task Force to examine how the Federal government can continue to strengthen our Nation's security, and do so in a way that upholds our American values.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Congress has established the Department of Homeland Security and directed the implementation of significant and wide-ranging new programs and policies to help prevent terrorist travel to this country.

For example, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has deployed Visa Security Units to our embassies and consulates overseas, supporting the State Department in vetting visa applicants.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection now utilizes the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) to screen Visa Waiver Program travelers before they are permitted to board a plane to the U.S. These agencies now also conduct recurrent vetting of all visa and ESTA holders to check against any new derogatory information.

These are just a few examples of the security initiatives implemented in the aftermath of 9/11 and on an ongoing basis as other potential vulnerabilities have been identified. Of course, more work remains to be done to ensure we continue to stay ahead of those who might seek to do us harm. That work must be done on a bipartisan basis, in the interest of all Americans, *and in keeping with our principles as a Nation of immigrants.*

Using rhetoric that divides us and alienates our foreign partners is counterproductive to the security of the United States. Banning certain groups of people from entering this country based on their faith, whether explicitly or implicitly, is unconstitutional. Playing on people's fears and prejudices for political gain is downright un-American. As a country we *can* do better.

I hope on this task force we *will* do better. America is always at its strongest when we stand together in support of our common good and our shared values. I appreciated hearing from our government witnesses yesterday, in a classified setting, about the good work the Departments of Homeland Security and State are doing to further enhance our security.

I hope to hear from those witnesses today about what more can be done to identify and thwart attempted terrorist travel on an individualized basis, and how Congress can support their efforts. I also hope to hear from our Government Accountability Office witness about what their work on these issues tells us about the best path forward.

I look forward to a productive hearing today and to working alongside my colleagues on the Task Force going forward.