



**Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)
Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security
Prepared Opening Statement for the Democratic Forum:**

“Countering Violent Extremism on America’s Public Lands”

Wednesday, June 15, 2016

Unfortunately, in the wake of the Orlando attack, we continue to hear some of the same dangerous rhetoric from the right and, in particular, from the presumptive Republican Presidential nominee. Renewed calls to close our borders, ban Muslims from immigrating to the United States, and shut down the refugee process have hit the front pages of our newspapers and are reverberating across the world. These calls willfully ignore that the perpetrator of the Orlando attack was a U.S.-born citizen. He was a homegrown violent extremist.

Moreover, since 9/11, every foreign-inspired attack that has been perpetrated in the United States has been carried out by a United States citizen or legal permanent resident. As such, calls of closing borders and banning certain groups of people from entering the United States are dangerously misdirected and counterproductive.

I say counterproductive because there is evidence that such heated rhetoric makes us less safe. It is fodder for domestic terrorist and anti-government groups. The anti-government movement embraces a distorted right-wing ideology. In a law enforcement survey conducted by the Triangle Center at Duke University, 74 percent of law enforcement professionals stated that the threat from anti-government groups was one of the top 3 concerns in their jurisdiction.

The Southern Poverty Law Center cites the number of anti-government groups grew by one third in 2015. Earlier this year, we saw the effects of the anti-government movement, when an armed militia forcibly took over of a Federally-owned wildlife refuge in Oregon.

This armed takeover triggered a standoff that lasted 41 days and resulted in 8 people being injured and one death. The Oregon standoff put our Federal employees at risk and may end up costing American taxpayers nearly 6 million dollars. It is important to note that even as Federal authorities dealt with the Oregon situation, they had to respond to 30 incidents of threatening behavior, vandalism, and related acts at 13 other wildlife refuges.

The growing threat of violence and terrorism by anti-government groups is a threat that demands timely Congressional attention and action. Yet, the Republican leadership has willfully ignored the threat. In the wake of the deadly attack this past weekend in Orlando, Americans are, again, demanding action from Congress to prevent dangerous people from accessing deadly weapons to kill innocent Americans. Congress must act now.

Like Ranking Member Grijalva, I, too, have asked my Chairman to hold hearings with the federal government on the threat from domestic terrorist groups, including anti-government groups. To date, none have been held and nothing has been scheduled.

Last week, the Speaker Paul Ryan released the House Republicans' agenda on national security. The agenda highlights the unprecedented spike in radicalization here at home and that terror has gone viral through social media. And that is true, like foreign terrorist organizations, anti-government movement leaders are using social media to transform this traditional right wing ideology into a more mainstream agenda. Many are calling the standoff at Malheur Refuge in Oregon as the country's first "social media occupation," citing the actors frequent use of websites and television coverage to push out their message.

Since many of the same tools being used for anti-government recruitment are the same as foreign terrorist organizations, it is hard to understand why the Federal government and Congress continue to ignore this alarming threat. The Federal government must tackle both the threat from foreign terrorist organizations and right wing violent extremists. Foreign terrorists and foreign inspired terrorists have the same goal as domestic terrorists—to harm and incite fear within our borders.

As a body, we must take this growing threat seriously and take action. That is why I believe that this Congressional forum is necessary and I appreciate all of you who have come forward to constructively engage on this critical homeland security issue.

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