

Chairman Peters Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: DHS Budget
April 18, 2024

The Committee will come to order.

Welcome back to the Committee, Secretary Mayorkas, and thank you for your continued service to our nation.

The Department of Homeland Security and its dedicated employees play an essential role in keeping our country safe. We must ensure that they have the resources necessary to keep doing that work and to safeguard our nation from rapidly evolving security threats. Today's hearing is an important step towards that goal.

This morning, we will examine President Biden's 2025 budget request and assess what the Department of Homeland Security needs to fulfill its critical missions in the coming year.

I am pleased that this proposal includes several investments to combat persistent threats in Michigan and across the country.

For instance, cyberattacks continue to pose serious threats to the homeland. This past February, a ransomware attack on Change Healthcare disrupted thousands of pharmacies and hospitals. Last summer, Microsoft faced a dangerous intrusion into its cloud system. And as always, cyberattacks from criminal organizations and foreign governments pose a great danger to our citizens. It's critical that the Department of Homeland Security receives the resources it needs to bolster our cybersecurity. I'm glad to see that this budget includes significant resources for CISA – our nation's leading cybersecurity agency.

We'll also have the chance to discuss the Department's plans to secure our Northern and Southern borders. The irregular flow of migrants at our Southern border continues to put a strain on law enforcement officials and neighboring communities. Members of this committee – Senators Sinema and Lankford – worked hard to negotiate a bipartisan border bill this past year and I would like to take a moment to thank them for their hard work in developing that compromise. Their bill had the potential to make substantial changes to our immigration system and would have provided critical resources to front-line operators. But partisan politics prevented us from passing it. These longstanding challenges are more serious than ever.

This budget gives us a chance to meet them head-on. President Biden's budget request includes resources to hire more law enforcement officers, update our screening technology, and help keep fentanyl from reaching our communities.

We also have to commit resources to our Northern Border. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I was proud to secure funding to establish the Northern Border Coordination Center, which will create one unified entity that focuses on keeping the Northern Border secure. I look forward to hearing Secretary Mayorkas' insights on the security needs at both our northern and southern borders.

Natural disasters and climate change continue to present some of the most serious threats to the homeland. I've been proud to work with DHS on efforts to mitigate damage from natural disasters and held a hearing earlier this year on the devastating effects of wildfires across our country. We must continue to strengthen our disaster response efforts – and I look forward to discussing how this proposal helps continue that work.

We also have to address the threat posed by unmanned aerial systems – more commonly known as drones. Whether they're used recklessly or controlled by an operator with bad intentions, drones can pose a serious security threat to mass gatherings like sporting events, concerts, and more.

The current authorities we need to address this problem are going to expire this May. I'll keep working to reauthorize and expand them, so that we can continue to protect our citizens, our airports, and our critical infrastructure from this growing threat. Secretary Mayorkas will provide a key perspective on how to address the increasing threat that drones pose to our communities.

Finally, the threat of domestic terrorism is more serious than ever. The war in Israel has heightened tensions here at home, leading to a spike in antisemitic, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate. At the same time, white supremacist and anti-government extremists continue to pose a significant terrorism threat to the United States.

I've been proud to work with the Department to address this problem and ensure that we are adequately tracking the danger it poses to our citizens. I'm glad that this proposal includes resources for the Nonprofit Security Grant Program – an initiative I helped establish that gives organizations and houses of worship the resources they need to stay safe. I look forward to hearing how else it will reduce the threat posed by domestic terrorism.

These are just a few examples of the security threats that face our nation and the solutions that have been proposed in the President's budget. I look forward to having a productive discussion today about the Department's plans to keep the American people safe.