

**Chairman Ron Johnson Opening Statement**  
**“Countering Domestic Terrorism: Examining the Evolving Threat”**  
**September 25, 2019**

*As prepared for delivery:*

This is the first in what I expect will be a series of hearings examining domestic acts of terrorism. Although we must remain vigilant, the defeat of the territorial caliphate of ISIS and focused counter-terrorism efforts have resulted in the recent decline in the number of ISIS inspired terrorist attacks in the United States and worldwide. Unfortunately, the increase in domestic attacks has kept our nation on edge and forced a re-evaluation of how law enforcement can and should deal with different kinds of threats.

In May, Ranking Member Peters and I sent letters to the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Department of Justice requesting basic information about their efforts to track, counter, and prevent all forms of domestic terrorism. From the outset of our inquiry, it has been clear that there is a lack of consistent and reliable data concerning domestic terrorism. If the federal government is not accurately tracking the threats and outcomes, it is exceedingly difficult for agencies and Congress to properly allocate resources and/or determine if additional authorities are required.

In allocating law enforcement resources and considering new authorities, it is important to put the threat and human cost of terrorism into perspective. In the 51 years from 1967 through 2017, there were 938,039 murders committed throughout the U.S. — an average of 18,393 murders per year, 183,929 per decade. According to the Washington Post, since August 1, 1966, there have been 167 mass shootings in which 1,207 individuals were killed — an average of approximately 228 per decade. START’s Global Terrorism Database reports 3,774 deaths from terrorist attacks in the U.S. over the five decades since 1970. Excluding 9/11’s death toll of 2,996, terror-related deaths since 1970 equal 778 — an average of 156 per decade.

In citing these statistics, I am in no way minimizing the human cost of terrorism or mass shootings. Every murder, regardless of the cause, is a tragedy that takes an incalculable toll on the lives of those affected. As a result, public policy, operating within the bounds of constitutional government and limited resources, should be designed to prevent as many of these tragedies as possible. The purpose of this hearing is to explore the many issues raised in attempting to achieve that worthy goal.

We need to understand how authorities differ in addressing international versus domestic terrorism. What is the proper role of federal versus state governments? What definitions need to be developed and what data needs to be gathered? What can be done to prevent online radicalization? How do we deal with “the not guilty yet”?

One final thought. Although I took no offense from any of the testimony, because I know none was intended, I do want to challenge the use of “far right” and “far left” as descriptive adjectives for hate groups like white supremacists, anti-Semites, or environmental terror groups. I realize this has become accepted terminology, but I believe we need to break that habit. There

is an acknowledged political spectrum ranging from left to right that is a useful shorthand description of one's general political philosophy. But hate groups not only fall far outside that spectrum, they also advocate and use violence to advance their political aims – a radical rejection of the norms that permit America to be a free and self-governing country. Those of us who abide by the fundamental rejection of political violence do not want to be, nor should we be, associated with such despicable views and evil behavior. So let's drop the far right / far left descriptors, and simply call a hate group a hate group and a terrorist a terrorist.

We have assembled a highly qualified panel of witnesses to discuss these and other issues. I thank you again, and look forward to your testimony.