

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
“Threats to the Homeland”
November 5, 2019

As submitted for the record:

The threats we face today are all too familiar. Most fall within the categories of the four main homeland security priorities of this committee: border security, cyber security, critical infrastructure security, and countering violent extremism. Unfortunately, these threats are evolving with the advance of technology, and countering them is becoming increasingly more complex and difficult.

This past year, 977,509 illegal aliens, mostly families, streamed across our southern border. This unprecedented surge is the product of a broken immigration system with legal loopholes that create perverse incentives for families to make a perilous journey to our country. Cartels and transnational criminal organizations profit not only from the fees they charge for safe passage, but also by using migrants as a diversion to smuggle even more illegal narcotics into our country. In the worst circumstances, these criminals traffic migrants against their will or subject them to involuntary servitude. Although the illegal flow has decreased from the month of May’s daily average of 4,651, the daily average still exceeds 1,400, and Congress has failed to act to address the root causes.

As our world becomes increasingly interconnected, the risk of - and harm caused by - cyber-attacks have grown exponentially. In addition to the persistent threats posed by state actors like Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, we must also confront the threat posed by criminal actors. Ransomware attacks not only target individuals, they have held entire cities hostage.

The 16 sectors of our critical infrastructure remain vulnerable to attack from foreign actors and to natural disasters like an EMP or GMD event. The race to 5G is underway, and we need focused and determined leadership to unlock this tremendous value for the U.S. economy. We must also protect our supply chain and that of our allies and close international partners. Supply chains that are not secure pose risks to our competitive advantage in commerce and to our national security.

Terrorism and targeted violence remain serious threats to our nation. Over the past year, the number of domestic terrorist attacks has continued to rise. Although the threat of international terrorism has seemingly waned after the defeat of ISIS’s physical caliphate and the recent elimination of its leader, we must remain vigilant as terrorist organizations regroup and evolve, foreign fighters leave Syria in search of new battlefields, and homegrown violent extremism becomes a growing reality.

Today, we will hear from three of the key agencies charged with defending our nation. I thank each of you for your service, and for participating in this important hearing. I look forward to your testimony.