



TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE

Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives

ON

“The Way Forward on Homeland Security”

9:30 a.m., March 17, 2021
Washington, D.C.

Introduction

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, and distinguished Members of the Committee,

It is an honor to appear before you today as the Secretary of Homeland Security. It is a privilege to return to the Department and lead the more than 240,000 employees who dedicate themselves every day to the safety and security of our Nation.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) confronts grave challenges, both seen and unseen, on behalf of the American people. The challenges include a deadly pandemic that has thrown every part of American life off its axis. Cyber attacks that target the federal government, our nation's critical infrastructure, companies, and individuals alike. Terrorism, both foreign and domestic, that endangers our communities and our way of life. Extreme weather events and other impacts of the climate crisis that threaten lives and livelihoods. At the same time, we are rebuilding an immigration system that was systematically dismantled during the prior administration. We are making risk-based investments in our border management system to create safe, legal, and humane pathways to asylum and humanitarian protection.

DHS is, fundamentally, a department of partnerships. Having been back at the Department for approximately 45 days, I continue to witness firsthand the importance of those partnerships. DHS interacts more with the American public on a daily basis than any other federal department or agency. To succeed in our mission, the Department must forge close relationships with state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments and law enforcement stakeholders, international partners, other federal agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and Congress.

The Department must do this important work while always remaining faithful to the law, our mission, and our country's values. Upon entering office, I made a commitment to issue a long-delayed regulation to implement the bipartisan STOP Act, a law that will help reduce the flow of opioids into this country and save lives. I am pleased to say that we already have issued the regulation. I thank members of Congress, on both sides of the aisle, for their leadership and support. The work of homeland security is not political.

During my testimony today, I will highlight DHS's broad and diverse mission and the talented individuals throughout the Department who keep our country safe.

Defeating the COVID-19 Pandemic

Supporting the Federal Response

On the first day of his Administration, President Biden challenged the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to stand up 100 federally-supported Community Vaccination Centers in only 30 days. FEMA stood up 441 within the time period. Today, that number is almost 690 and growing each day. President Biden also challenged us to deliver 100 million vaccinations across the country in 100 days. We are well past 79 million and on track to reach our goal.

We are particularly focused on ensuring vaccine equity. FEMA is working with its partners to provide a supplemental allocation of vaccines above and beyond state allocations to accelerate access, and it is developing mobile vaccination sites that can more effectively reach vulnerable and rural populations. As a condition of FEMA's assistance, FEMA is requiring communities to gather the data needed to equitably distribute vaccines and ensure that no one is left behind. Further, FEMA is providing direct technical assistance to improve access to the vaccine by leveraging resources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Social Vulnerability Index when deciding where to locate vaccine sites. The President has committed to providing the vaccine to our entire population regardless of race, ethnicity, access to transportation, or immigration status. Those who lack legal status in this country should know that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection will not conduct immigration enforcement operations at or near vaccine distribution sites or clinics.

To protect the traveling public and those who work in the transportation industry, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) issued guidance to require mask use on commercial airlines and various modes of surface transportation effective February 1, 2021. It will do so pursuant to President Biden's Executive Order on Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel.

ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) also launched Operation Stolen Promise to protect the homeland from COVID-19-related fraud and criminal activity. Criminal organizations will undoubtedly continue to adapt and attempt to capitalize on the public demand for access to personal protective equipment such as N95 masks, vaccines, and other COVID-19 treatments as they are developed and approved or authorized, and will attempt to illegally introduce counterfeit or otherwise illicit versions into U.S. and global marketplaces. HSI, the U.S. Secret Service (USSS), and other Department resources are dedicating their skills and resources to identify and take down these criminal organizations.

Vaccinating the DHS Workforce

As Secretary, I have no greater obligation than that of ensuring the health and safety of the DHS workforce, 80 percent of whom are frontline or public-facing employees. Five days into the Biden-Harris Administration, DHS launched Operation Vaccinate Our Workforce (VOW) to accelerate the administration of COVID-19 vaccines to DHS employees on a voluntary basis and in accordance with CDC recommendations. Operation VOW is working with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to provide national access to vaccines for DHS frontline employees, pursuing SLTT partnerships to complement VHA options, and ensuring personnel are provided the time and resources necessary to get vaccinated. On the first day of the Biden-Harris Administration, less than two percent of our frontline workforce had been vaccinated. Today, that share has grown to more than 26 percent.

Strengthening Cybersecurity and Critical Infrastructure

The recent cyber attack campaigns exploiting SolarWinds and Microsoft highlight the significant cybersecurity challenges our Nation faces. Beyond cyber espionage, cyber attacks can paralyze

companies and entire cities and are among the most serious security threats our country confronts.

The Department's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) leads federal efforts to mitigate cybersecurity risks to the United States. Through the U.S. Coast Guard and TSA, DHS focuses on the cybersecurity of transportation, from aviation and rail to maritime and pipelines. The USSS and HSI combat 21st century crimes, many of which are cyber-enabled. They play a pivotal role in identifying and apprehending the perpetrators of computer network breaches, ransomware attacks, and other cyber-enabled financial and cross-border crimes.

In February, DHS announced initial steps to implement the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to elevating cybersecurity across every level of government. The Department's immediate focus will be on securing federal civilian networks, supporting SLTT governments to be more resilient, and protecting the Nation's critical functions. To do so effectively, DHS will further strengthen its partnerships with the private sector and invest in the infrastructure and people required to defend against malicious cyber attacks as part of a whole-of-government effort.

Securing Federal Civilian Networks

The recent cyber intrusion campaigns affecting federal agencies and private sector organizations are a clarion call to urgently improve our national cybersecurity and resilience. One of these malicious campaigns was undertaken by a highly sophisticated adversary, likely of Russian origin, that used unique techniques and skilled tradecraft to remain hidden for an extended period. DHS, through CISA, is leading the national effort to help impacted entities understand the scope of both compromises, remove adversaries from impacted networks, and provide guidance to reduce the likelihood of further compromise.

DHS's own networks were compromised by the campaign exploiting SolarWinds, but the Department was able to continue to execute its mission. Since we first learned about the breach in early December 2020, our teams have worked around the clock to respond. Since I became Secretary, we have also provided additional guidance to the DHS workforce on best practices. While our public-facing services were not affected and we no longer see indicators of compromise on our networks, we have more work to do to fully secure our network against future attacks. DHS networks and cybersecurity best practices should be a model for other civilian agencies.

This campaign illuminated gaps in the cybersecurity posture of federal and civilian networks. We must use this moment as an opportunity to make significant improvements. Congress recently appropriated \$650 million in funding to strengthen CISA and ensure it has the resources and capacity to effectively implement its authorities, including those provided by Congress to CISA in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 National Defense Authorization Act. We are grateful to this Committee for its support.

Supporting SLTT partners to Increase Security and Resiliency Against Malicious Cyber Activity

The Department invested significant resources in helping SLTT officials secure the 2020 election through close collaboration. As this work continues, we must remain focused so election officials have the resources, training, and information necessary to safeguard our democracy against cybersecurity threats. We must also urgently protect the COVID-19 supply chain and healthcare facilities from malicious cyber activity. To meet this need, CISA launched a major effort to provide targeted cybersecurity assistance and support in coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and other federal partners. CISA is also directly engaging with companies supporting vaccine clinical trials and manufacturing to help secure their networks.

Ransomware also poses an increasing threat to public and private networks and our national security. SLTT governments, in particular, face unprecedented cybersecurity risks. DHS supports our SLTT partners by sharing information about these risks, providing assessments and guidance, and offering incident response or threat-hunting services upon request.

Finally, the recent intrusion into a water treatment plant in Florida demonstrates a critical need to secure industrial control systems that underpin many essential functions. It is a top priority to ensure that owners and operators of facilities that rely on industrial control systems employ cybersecurity best practices, protect their critical infrastructure, and reduce malicious cyber activity. CISA is constantly working with businesses, communities, and governments at every level to make the Nation's critical infrastructure more resilient to both cyber and physical threats.

Rebuilding a Fair and Efficient Immigration System and Managing our Borders

The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to rebuilding a safe, orderly, and humane immigration system. Let me be clear that the Department continues to enforce our immigration laws and responsibly manage our border, while we restore fairness and efficiency in our immigration system, which was systematically dismantled during the last four years.

The situation at our southern border cannot and will not be transformed overnight, due in large part to the damage done over the last four years. Our primary responsibility is to keep our homeland and the American people safe. We are safer when we take a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to border management, ensuring that policies and procedures at the border are consistent with American values, immigration laws, and regulations.

Addressing the Current Challenges at the Border

The Department is responding to historic and unprecedented challenges at the border, including the arrival of record levels of unaccompanied children. DHS has deployed multi-faceted strategies to address the need at the border, including tapping FEMA resources, activating our volunteer workforce to assist with DHS's response, engaging our Chief Medical Officer and his team on ensuring COVID-19 safety at every step of the process, and expanding DHS's processing capacity. We are also working with HHS, which has the responsibility for care and

custody of unaccompanied children, to ensure that HHS increases its capacity and fulfills its responsibilities more efficiently and expeditiously.

The Biden-Harris Administration is fully committed to addressing long-standing migration challenges in the region and at the border. There is no single solution that will adequately address these challenges. First, the most sustainable solution is to address the root causes that drive people to migrate in the first place. We must engage with regional governments and other partners to alleviate the insecurity, violence, corruption, and systemic poverty that drives migrants from their homes. Second, we must work with regional governments and international humanitarian organizations to provide potential migrants with meaningful opportunities to seek protection, including through potential migration avenues, from as close to home as possible. These opportunities should include refugee resettlement and family reunification programs in the United States and other countries in the region, and regional relocation and integration programs. Third, we must ensure shared responsibility with other countries in the region by supporting their efforts to improve their asylum adjudication capabilities and protect migrants. Finally, we must dramatically improve our system for processing migrants at the border and adjudicating their asylum claims in a fair and timely way.

While these efforts will dramatically improve migration management in the region and help to restore safe and orderly processing at the border, they will take time, as the President noted. Addressing longstanding challenges after the dismantling of the system cannot be accomplished overnight.

Reunifying Families

President Biden has made one of his top priorities reversing the effects of the previous Administration's cruel immigration policies that separated parents from their children to deter others from seeking to enter this country. Families belong together. The Biden-Harris Administration will protect family unity and ensure that children entering the United States are not separated from their parents for the purpose of reducing immigration flows. Separations will only occur when it is unavoidably necessary, such as for the safety and well-being of the child or as required by law. Under the leadership of Executive Director Michelle Brané and guided by a statement of principles that I issued on March 1, 2021, the Family Reunification Task Force will urgently reunite separated families and make recommendations regarding the provision of services to support their recovery from the trauma of separation. The Task Force is exploring how best to support these efforts. We will work closely with this Committee, the other Members of Congress, and our partners in the private sector to achieve this moral imperative through an all-of-society effort.

Ending the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP)

On February 19, DHS began winding down MPP by paroling certain individuals into the United States through a phased strategy developed in close coordination with the Department of State and the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Government of Mexico, international humanitarian organizations, and domestic non-governmental organizations. In conjunction with these agencies and organizations, DHS has established a triaging system in northern Mexico to identify,

prioritize, and funnel MPP cases to select U.S. ports of entry consistent with our capacity to safely process individuals at those ports. This process includes testing and other robust COVID-19 protocols and close coordination with local stakeholders, including SLTT governments. In this initial phase, we are processing individuals who are enrolled in MPP, have cases pending before DOJ's Executive Office for Immigration Review, and do not pose a national security or public safety risk. This is part of our broader plan to address the challenges at our southern border.

Improving our Asylum System

We are working to dramatically improve the time spent processing and adjudicating certain asylum claims made at the southern border. The asylum program was dismantled over the last four years, in both DHS and DOJ. Rebuilding the system will address many of the operational issues, along with the ongoing processing delays. DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the DOJ's Executive Office for Immigration Review, the two agencies that share responsibility for processing asylum cases, are significantly overloaded with cases and straining under significant backlogs, making it extremely difficult to hear cases and adjudicate claims efficiently and effectively. In some locations, there is a more than four-year waiting period for a final hearing.

We are exploring the various options for increasing the fairness and efficiency in processing asylum claims. We are also exploring the option, in consultation with DOJ, of building a system that will allow asylum officers to consider more cases in the first instance. We believe this change could result in cases being heard and adjudicated more efficiently.

Strengthening Enforcement and Removal Policies

Last month, ICE issued interim guidance to its workforce to focus its law enforcement efforts and resources on threats to national security, border security, and public safety. These priorities have enabled our limited resources to be expended most effectively. I will assess the results of this interim guidance to inform the issuance of longer-term enforcement and removal priorities.

Immigration Reform

I look forward to working with Congress on restoring humanity and American values to our immigration system, including through legislative action that:

- provides pathways to citizenship for hardworking people who enrich our communities every day and who have lived in the United States for years, in some cases for decades;
- allows undocumented individuals to apply for temporary legal status, with the ability to apply for lawful permanent residency after five years if they pass criminal and national security background checks and pay their taxes;
- modernizes our immigration system, and prioritizes keeping families together;
- clears employment-based visa backlogs, recaptures unused visas, reduces lengthy wait times, and eliminates per-country visa caps;

- protects workers from exploitation, ensures fairness for U.S. workers, and improves the employment verification process;
- codifies and funds the President’s \$4 billion four-year interagency plan to address the underlying causes of migration in the region; and,
- creates safe and legal channels for people to seek protection.

Stopping the Threat of Domestic Violent Extremism

Terrorist threats to the United States have evolved and become more diverse since the attacks on September 11, 2001. Pernicious threats, both foreign and domestic, remain. Currently, the most significant terrorist threat facing our Nation comes from lone offenders and small groups of individuals who commit acts of violence that are motivated by a broad range of extreme racial, political, religious, anti-government, societal, and personal ideological beliefs.

Domestic violent extremism is typically fueled by false narratives, conspiracy theories, and extremist rhetoric usually spread through social media and other online platforms. The lethality of this threat is evidenced by the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, and other recent attacks across the United States, including against government buildings and personnel and minority groups. Combatting this violence requires a whole-of-government approach, which I have already initiated at DHS in collaboration with key partners, including DOJ, to help ensure the violence and assault on democracy that occurred on January 6th does not occur again.

This year, and for the first time, I designated “combating domestic violent extremism” as a National Priority Area for the FY 2021 State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) and Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant programs. Recipients of these grants will be required to spend at least 7.5 percent of their awards on combating domestic violent extremism, resulting in at least \$77 million in grant funding being spent on building the capability to detect and protect against threats from domestic violent extremism. Additionally, the \$20 million Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program supports the implementation and evaluation of innovative community-based prevention programs and identifies efforts that are demonstrably effective to replicate them across the country. The Department also continues to increase support for establishing and enhancing local prevention programs through the provision of financial, educational, and technical assistance services.

I have directed an expansion of our analytic focus, including to more comprehensively assess how extremist actors exploit and leverage social media and other online platforms, and how those online activities are linked to real-world violence. The Department will share related findings with SLTT government and law enforcement partners.

The Department will also expand its intelligence and information-sharing capabilities, particularly with SLTT and international partners, including to more comprehensively assess the transnational elements associated with certain domestic extremist movements.

Further, DHS will continue to disseminate intelligence to the broadest audience, at the lowest classification level possible, while protecting privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties. In January, the Department issued the first National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) Bulletin in more

than a year. It warned the American public about the threat from ideologically-motivated violent extremists. The Department will continue to leverage the NTAS as a critical tool, among others, for communicating with the public.

Continued support from the public is essential to identifying and reporting suspicious activity and threats of violence, especially online. DHS is enhancing its public awareness campaigns and resilience to disinformation and other false narratives that inspire domestic extremist violence by updating its “If You See Something, Say Something®” campaign and refreshing its Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative to facilitate our partners’ ability to identify, evaluate, and report tips related to terrorism, regardless of ideology. DHS is also working to support the efforts of technology companies and other private-sector partners to curb online recruitment and radicalization to violence.

To ensure the Department is able to adequately address the evolving threat in this area longer-term, I look forward to working with Congress to examine our current legal authorities to access, collect, integrate, and share information posted on social media and other online platforms and consider whether there may be opportunities to enhance DHS’s ability to take actions that would protect the public, consistent with privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties.

Building and Championing the DHS Workforce

Ensuring that DHS reflects the public it serves is a top priority. It is the right thing to do and it also helps us successfully meet our mission. Although the Department’s workforce is among the most diverse across the federal government, our work to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion across DHS remains far from over. DHS will invest in recruiting, training, and retaining more women, people of color, and minorities, including in leadership positions across the Department. DHS will also develop innovative solutions to hiring, including through existing programs and new initiatives that expand our recruitment footprint in underrepresented and underserved communities.

Having served at the Department before, I know what a privilege it is to work alongside the passionate and mission-driven employees at DHS. On my first day, I committed to supporting this workforce with everything I have, including by providing them the resources they need and the opportunities they deserve.

This past year has presented immense challenges for our workforce. As of March 12, fifty-eight of our beloved DHS colleagues have lost their lives due to COVID-19. In the recently-released Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, DHS lags behind government-wide averages for concern about employees’ health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. On my watch, that will change.

I look forward to directly engaging with DHS employees to fully understand what they need to accomplish our critical mission. I will also work closely with our unions as key partners to achieve our shared goal of protecting and advancing the well-being of our personnel.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for this Committee's continued support of our Department. As the Department tackles near- and long-term priorities, I am committed to partnering with Congress in service of the American people.

Thank you.