

FUNDING LAPSE AND SECURITY GAPS: ASSESSING THE HARMFUL IMPACTS
OF THE DHS SHUTDOWN ON AMERICANS

Hearing Before the House Homeland Security Committee

Testimony of George Retes
U.S. Citizen and Iraq Combat Veteran

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

Chairman Garbarino, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and provide this testimony.

My name is George Retes. I'm 26 years old, a U.S. citizen, a veteran, and a father of two from Ventura, California.

Last July, I was wrongfully detained by federal agents during an immigration raid while on my way to work. I did everything right. I identified myself. I told them I was an American citizen. I told them I was a veteran. I pointed at my place of work, which was right behind the barricade they established. None of it mattered.

In that moment, my constitutional rights didn't protect me. My service didn't protect me. My citizenship didn't protect me. I want you to understand exactly what that situation looked like.

On July 10, 2025, I was driving to my job as a security guard at a licensed farm in Camarillo, California. Federal immigration agents were lined across the road that led to the farm where I worked. I clearly stated my citizenship and fully complied with officers, even though they were all yelling contradictory orders and no one was clearly in charge. Agents were yelling at me to reverse, to get out of my vehicle, to pull over to the side, to leave. Yet, despite doing everything right, I was detained and treated as if I had no rights. Agents engulfed my car with tear gas, smashed my window, pepper-sprayed my face, and dragged me out. I was choking on gas, unable to breathe, and even though I wasn't resisting, I had one agent kneeling on my back and another kneeling on my neck while my hands were already behind my back.

I was first taken to a Navy base, where the agents took my fingerprints, picture, and DNA. I was then taken to a detention center and held for three days without charges. No phone call. No lawyer. No medical care, even though my skin burned from the chemicals. I never even got to shower. Friday morning, I was put on suicide watch. Suicide watch is a yellow concrete room with a concrete bed and a tiny mattress on top; they leave the light on 24/7. I'm naked in a hospital gown, and a guard watches me. I'm like that in those conditions from Friday morning to the point I was released. I was released with zero charges and no explanation for anything that happened. I missed my daughter's third birthday while in this unjustified detention.

After my release, the harm did not stop. Instead of correcting the record, officials from DHS, specifically DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin, used social media to spread false and misleading statements about me in attempt to justify my detention and undermine my credibility.

I was wrongfully detained and then publicly misrepresented by the very agency that violated my rights. That is not transparency. That is damage control at the expense of the truth.

What happened to me is not just a mistake. It is a failure of process, a failure of accountability, a failure of training, and it was a breakdown of the basic responsibility the government has to the people it serves.

We talk a lot in this country about law and order. But law and order only works when the law is applied correctly and when the people enforcing it are held accountable when they get it wrong.

Because when federal agents can violate someone's rights and face no immediate consequence, that is not law and order. That is government overreach.

If a U.S. citizen, an Army veteran, someone who complied, identified himself, and broke no law can be treated this way, detained without charges, denied basic rights, physically restrained, and then publicly smeared to justify it, then no one in this country is as safe as they believe they are.

The Constitution does not only apply when it is convenient. Civil rights do not disappear because an agency makes a mistake. And truth does not stop mattering because it is uncomfortable.

I'm not asking for sympathy. I'm asking for accountability, not just for myself, but for everyone who does not have a platform, a lawyer, or the ability to stand in front of you and tell their story. Because if this can happen to me, it can happen to anyone.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify; I welcome your questions.