

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

June 14, 2024

The Honorable Gary Peters
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters:

We, as members of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee (HSGAC), strongly urge you to convene a hearing to examine the threat of individuals exploiting the Southern border for potential terrorist activities and the recent arrests of eight foreign nationals with suspected ties to ISIS. Over the past three years, the current administration's policies have effectively opened our borders, allowing millions, including individuals with potential criminal and terrorist intent, to enter the United States unchecked.

Recent incidents underscore the urgency of this matter. In June 2024, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), in coordination with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), detained several individuals with suspected ties to the Islamic State.¹ The operations were conducted in New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, involving foreign nationals who allegedly entered the U.S. through the Southwest border.² This alarming situation requires immediate oversight from our Committee, particularly given the complete lack of information about the circumstances.

Since 2021, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has encountered more than 8 million aliens at the Southwest border.³ The high volume of crossings overwhelms our ability to effectively vet and track these individuals. Consequently, even more individuals evade capture, and we lack the capacity to adequately vet those we do catch. During the same period of record-breaking encounters, CBP encountered more than 360 individuals on the terrorist watchlist attempting to cross the Southwest border illegally.⁴ This number marks a significant increase compared to the 11 encountered in the previous four years.⁵ It is clear, that the unprecedented influx has created a

¹ Eric Tucker & Rebecca Santana, 8 People with Possible Islamic State Ties Arrested in US on Immigration Violations, AP News (June 12, 2024), <https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-border-fbi-homeland-security-7088e6f665f095ad38186cafe69bbddd>.

² *Id.*

³ CBP Nationwide Encounters Data, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters> (Data filtered for southern border only. Data available for Fiscal Years 2021, 2022, 2023, data available for Fiscal Year 2024 through April).

⁴ CBP Enforcement Statistics, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (May 15, 2024) <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics>

⁵ *Id.*

dangerous gap in our national security, allowing terrorists to enter undetected and remain unnoticed for years

During his testimony before the House Judiciary Committee on June 4, 2024, Attorney General Merrick Garland expressed grave concern on this very subject, stating, “I’m worried about the possibility of a terrorist attack in the country after October 7. The threat level has gone up enormously. Every morning, we worry about this question.”⁶ On the same day, the FBI Director Christopher Wray provided similar testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies. Director Wray stated, “We have seen over the last five to six years an increase in the number of known or suspected terrorists, in other words, watch-listed suspects attempting to cross the border.”⁷

Faced with elevated threats, it is well past time to hold a public hearing on the danger of terrorism facilitated by easy access across the border. For over three years, members of this Committee have repeatedly sounded the alarm on the need for oversight of the crisis at the Southwest border.⁸ The policies implemented by the Biden administration have directly contributed to unprecedented levels of illegal immigration, exposing a vulnerability that bad actors can exploit to enter the country.

Therefore, we urge you to convene a critically needed hearing with top officials from the relevant federal agencies to discuss the Biden administration's strategy for handling the significant increase in terrorists entering the country due to their policies.

We appreciate your attention on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Rand Paul, M.D.
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland
Security and Governmental Affairs



Mitt Romney
United States Senator

⁶ Oversight of the U.S. Department of Justice: Hearing Before the H. Comm. on the Judiciary, 118th Cong. (2024), available at <https://judiciary.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/oversight-us-department-justice-4>.

⁷ U.S. Senate Comm. on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, *A Review of the President's Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request for the Federal Bureau of Investigation*, 118th Cong. (June 4, 2024).

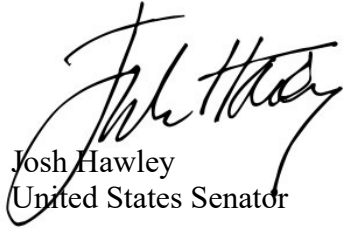
⁸ See Letter to Gary Peters, Chairman, Sen. Comm. on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, from Sens. Rick Scott, Ron Johnson, Rob Portman, Rand Paul, James Lankford, Josh Hawley, and Mitt Romney, Feb. 11, 2022; Letter to Gary Peters, Chairman, Sen. Comm. on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, and Sen. Rob Portman, Ranking Member, Sen. Comm. on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, from Sens. Ron Johnson, Josh Hawley, James Lankford, Rick Scott, and Rand Paul, Sept. 24, 2022.



James Lankford
United States Senator



Ron Johnson
United States Senator



Josh Hawley
United States Senator



Rick Scott
United States Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator