

March 22, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

As you know, one of the most important responsibilities vested to the Secretary of Homeland Security is the prevention of entry into the United States of terrorists.¹ This responsibility is not without challenge or controversy in the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) history, but it is indisputable that successfully accomplishing this mission becomes more urgent as crises on our borders occur. As the number of immigrants seeking entry into the United States through land borders or ports of entry increases, threatening to overwhelm the dedicated agents of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), our adversaries may seek to exploit these challenges.

A January 7, 2019, fact sheet released by DHS noted that in 2018, more than 3,000 individuals whose patterns of travel raised concerns were stopped from entering the United States on the Southern Border (*Special Interest Aliens*). In the same fact sheet, DHS reported that in Fiscal Year 2017, 3,755 *known or suspected terrorists* (KSTs) were apprehended after seeking entry into the United States through ports of entry or land borders.

However, open-source reporting indicates that the number of apprehensions of individuals suspected of terrorist ties was dramatically different during that time frame. In the first half of Fiscal Year 2018, for instance, 132 individuals in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Terrorist Screening Database were apprehended on the Southern and Northern Borders combined. One of the challenges for Congress as we pursue our oversight responsibilities is the differing statistics and definitions used by the federal agencies in reporting their activities to Congress, as well as the sensitive nature of these statistics. In the 2019 fact sheet cited above, DHS utilized such a need for secrecy in not releasing "the [exact] number of terror-watchlisted individuals encountered at our Southern Border."

As the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations subcommittee tasked with global responsibility for counterterrorism matters, including up to the limit of our own national borders, I write to request that in the interest of public safety and national security, you use your authority to publicly release data from all previous and current years relating to the number of individuals apprehended at land borders or ports of entry, including those who were known or suspected terrorists, of interest to law enforcement due to their patterns of travel, or

¹ 6 U.S.C. § 202(1)

were or are listed on the FBI's Terrorist Screening Database. I ask that these statistics be reported to Congress for the awareness of all members, with the inclusion of a classified annex for information still deemed to be too sensitive for public distribution. Further, in accordance with my oversight responsibilities and in light of the current situation at our Southern Border, it is critical that I receive a classified briefing on this matter no later than April 30, 2021.

As Congress considers the authorities and budgets of our nation's counterterrorism activities, it is vital that we be in possession of all the facts. CBP recently reported that more than 100,000 individuals attempted entry into the United States along our Southern Border in the month of February—an increase of 28 percent from the prior month. Given this influx, Congress must ensure that DHS and CBP are best positioned to counter any threats from terrorism. This mission starts with information.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I look forward to your cooperation with this request.

Regards,



Todd Young
United States Senator

CC: John T. Godfrey

Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Acting Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS