



Mayorkas, Wray Snub Senate Hearing on Threats to Homeland

In an unprecedented move, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and FBI Director Christopher Wray declined to testify publicly at the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee's annual "[Threats to the Homeland](#)" hearing on Thursday, November 21. This marks the first time in more than 15 years that both officials have refused to appear before the public at this critical oversight session.

Earlier this week, the companion committee in the House [announced](#) that its scheduled hearing on the topic, originally set for Wednesday and featuring Wray and Mayorkas as witnesses, has been postponed to December, with the exact date yet to be confirmed.



AP Images
Christopher Wray

Too Sensitive for the Public?

The decision to snub the hearings was apparently based on the sensitive nature of the information to be discussed.

In a statement provided to the media, the FBI said that the bureau remains "committed to sharing information about the continuously evolving threat environment facing our nation." They added that the talks about the security of the nation in the coming year would take place behind closed doors. According to the [National Review](#), the bureau said,

FBI leaders have testified extensively in public settings about the current threat environment and believe the Committee would benefit most from further substantive discussions and additional information that can only be provided in a classified setting.

Similarly, a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spokesperson noted that both agencies had offered the lawmakers a classified briefing while providing "extensive unclassified information about the current threat environment."

That includes the [Homeland Threat Assessment](#) published by the DHS in October.

In the document, the department acknowledged that the threat from both domestic and foreign terrorism will likely remain high in 2025. It also highlighted persistent risks from illegal drug trafficking, cyber and physical attacks on critical infrastructure, and foreign influence operations, particularly from China, Russia, and Iran.



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on November 22, 2024

The DHS statement also reminded us that Mayorkas has testified before Congress an impressive 30 times. While one might admire his endurance, this sudden reluctance to engage in public discussions about national security raises eyebrows. Perhaps America's top security officials prefer operating out of the public eye — or are simply weary of evading the same questions yet again. After all, there's only so much you can say about the threats to homeland security without venturing into uncomfortable territory — such as acknowledging that many of those threats are direct consequences of the DHS's and FBI's own policies and actions. Repeating yourself for the 31st time might hit a little too close to home.

Significance of Hearing

Many consider the annual hearing a pivotal event at which top U.S. security officials provide testimony on the nation's current security challenges. This hearing offers a platform for transparent discussions on a range of threats, including terrorism, cyberattacks, and other national security concerns.

Traditionally, the hearing features testimonies from key figures such as the secretary of Homeland Security, the FBI director, and the director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC).

These sessions are crucial for informing both lawmakers and the public about the strategies and measures in place to safeguard the nation. They also serve as an accountability mechanism, allowing for scrutiny of the effectiveness of current policies and the identification of areas needing improvement.

Bipartisan Ire

Despite the explanation provided, the top officials' absence from the public hearing drew sharp criticism from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.

Committee Chairman Gary Peters (D-Mich.) expressed strong disapproval of the move, calling it a "shocking departure" from the Senate tradition of "transparency and oversight of the threats facing the nation."

Peters further lamented,

[Mayorkas' and Wray's] choice to not provide public testimony about their departments' efforts to address wide-ranging national security threats robs the American people of critical information and the opportunity for public accountability of what the federal government is doing to keep Americans safe.

According to [The Hill](#), Peters also said, referring to the DHS's annual assessment, "The Department of Homeland Security put out a 40-page document talking about threats to the homeland. There would be questions surrounding that document that members would want to ask."

Senator James Lankford (R-Okla.) disclosed that the hearing was initially postponed in September at the request of the officials, who argued that holding it before the election might be perceived as "too political." He added that the senators asked the official to provide them with numbers of the "special interest aliens" out of the DHS "for month" and getting a response. The term describes non-U.S. persons whose travel patterns or other behaviors potentially pose a national security risk to the country or its interests.

Senator Josh Hawley (R-Mo.), who also serves on the committee, condemned the officials, accusing



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them of “brazenly” attempting to avoid accountability for recent controversies, including issues [involving FEMA](#) and the FBI.

In a subsequent tweet, Hawley reminded the public that the officials are legally obligated to provide their testimonies. He called on the Senate to “subpoena them immediately.”

Laken Riley

Hawley asserted that the motivation behind the decision stemmed, at least in major part, from the [verdict](#) in the Laken Riley murder case. On Wednesday, Jose Ibarra, an illegal immigrant convicted of the young woman’s murder, was sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

Hawley also called on Wray to “resign right now.”

Trump

This development occurs during a significant political transition as President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office in January. Trump has expressed intentions to overhaul both the DHS and the FBI, adding further scrutiny to the actions of their current leaders.

For DHS and its prospected secretary, Kristi Noem of South Dakota, the focus will be on intensifying immigration enforcement, strengthening border security, and streamlining agency operations.

Regarding the FBI, Trump has [indicated plans](#) to appoint new leadership aligned with his administration’s objectives. This includes the potential replacement of current FBI Director Wray before the conclusion of his 10-year term.

These potential overhauls are part of a [broader effort](#) by the incoming administration to restructure federal agencies.



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