

U.S. Sen. Johnson: HSGAC Republicans demand hearing on Disinformation Governance Board

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WASHINGTON – On Tuesday, U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) joined U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio), Ranking Member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and five of their Republican colleagues in a letter to Senator Gary Peters (D-MI), Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, requesting a hearing with Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas regarding his misleading testimony about the Department of Homeland Security’s Disinformation Governance Board before the Committee on May 4, 2022. Recent [documents](#) obtained by Sens. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) appear to contradict the Secretary’s sworn [testimony](#) before the Committee on the nature and scope of the Disinformation Governance Board. The senators are calling for the Chairman of the Committee to provide the oversight and transparency the American public deserves.

“We write to request you convene a hearing with Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas as soon as possible to answer critical questions about apparently misleading testimony before the Committee on May 4 on the Department of Homeland Security Disinformation Governance Board (the Board). We are deeply concerned that documents recently obtained by Senators Josh Hawley and Chuck Grassley contradict the Secretary’s testimony and public statements about the Board. The American public deserves transparency and honest answers to important questions about the true nature and purpose of the Disinformation Governance Board and it is clear that Secretary Mayorkas has not

provided them—to the public or this Committee. Therefore, we request you hold a hearing with Secretary Mayorkas and join us in insisting that all records related to the Board be provided to the Committee prior to the hearing,” **wrote the senators.**

Sens. Johnson and Portman are joined on the letter by Senators Rand Paul (R-Ky.), James Lankford (R-Okla.), Mitt Romney (R-Utah), Rick Scott (R-Fla.) and Josh Hawley (R-Mo.)

The full letter can be found [here](#) and below.

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We write to request you convene a hearing with Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas as soon as possible to answer critical questions about apparently misleading testimony before the Committee on May 4 on the Department of Homeland Security Disinformation Governance Board (the Board). We are deeply concerned that documents recently obtained by Senators Josh Hawley and Chuck Grassley contradict the Secretary’s testimony and public statements about the Board.

At the May 4 hearing, Secretary Mayorkas testified that the Board “has not yet begun its work.” Yet the documents indicate the Secretary had stood up the Board on February 24, 2022—more than two months earlier. The Board’s charter, signed by the Secretary, required the Board meet “regularly” and “no less than once per quarter.” Another document dated only six days before Secretary Mayorkas appeared before the Committee provides preparatory materials for a meeting between Under Secretary for Policy Robert Silvers and Twitter. The document was prepared by Ms. Nina Jankowicz in her capacity as “Executive Director DHS Disinformation Governance Board,” clearly evidencing that the Board had already

begun its work.

Based on the documents received, Secretary Mayorkas also misrepresented the nature and scope of the Board in his testimony and public statements. Responding to a question from a reporter “Will American citizens be monitored?” Secretary Mayorkas responded unequivocally “No,” adding that “We at the Department of Homeland Security don’t monitor American citizens.” He went on to suggest the Board would be concentrating on foreign threats—“addressing the threat of disinformation from foreign state adversaries [and] from the cartels.” Yet talking points prepared by Ms. Jankowicz, the Board’s then-Executive Director appear to show that the Department does in fact monitor American citizens and that the Board’s work is concentrated on domestic threats. She writes that the Board’s initial work plan includes working with “industry on countering MDM [mis-, dis-, or mal-information] related to domestic violent extremism” further noting that the Department recently established a “domestic terrorism branch” within the Department’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis—the Department’s office responsible for collecting and analyzing intelligence. A September 13, 2021, memorandum from Under Secretary Silvers recommending the establishment of the disinformation board also lists several other categories of domestic homeland security disinformation that the board could address including “conspiracy theories about the validity and security of elections,” and domestic violent extremism. In a related example at the May 4 hearing, Senator Rand Paul questioned Secretary Mayorkas saying “I said a million times that masks don’t work . . . You’re going to take that down?” Secretary Mayorkas responded, “it’s not for us to take that down . . . we are not the public health experts to make that determination.” Yet in the above referenced memorandum to the Secretary, Under Secretary Silvers lists “disinformation related to the origins and effects of COVID-19 vaccines or the efficacy of masks” as the second example of homeland security disinformation the Board would be established to coordinate efforts to counter.

We are also troubled that Secretary Mayorkas failed to provide these documents to the Committee. But for the actions of a whistleblower, it is unlikely any of this information would have come to light. The Secretary failed to provide the Committee these key documents despite a request from Senator Hawley to Secretary Mayorkas at the May 4 hearing that the Secretary provide the Committee

with “documents pertaining to the board” and the Secretary’s assurances that “we owe you documents with respect to the work of this board that are already in existence” and that “we will produce the documents that you have requested unless there is a legal prohibition from us doing so.”

The American public deserves transparency and honest answers to important questions about the true nature and purpose of the Disinformation Governance board and it is clear that Secretary Mayorkas has not provided them—to the public or this Committee. Therefore, we request you hold a hearing with Secretary Mayorkas and join us in insisting that all records related to the Board be provided to the Committee prior to the hearing.

Sincerely,