

Legislative, Executive Branches Have a Tangled Relationship Over Homeland Security

With homeland security being such a national priority, one would expect Congress and the Department of Homeland Security to have a well-organized relationship.

Unfortunately, that is not the case.

On Wednesday, the House Homeland Security Committee marked up a bill that would reauthorize the Department of Homeland Security for the first time since 2002, when the department was conceived.

Why has Congress put off the task for so long? In large part because over the past 15 years, Homeland Security has reported to between 80 and 120 different committees and subcommittees in Congress.

This complicated oversight arrangement exists because the committees that originally had jurisdiction over the department's component organizations refuse to give up their power.

When portions of 22 different organizations, spanning from the Department of Defense to the Department of Transportation, were consolidated following 9/11 to form the Department of Homeland Security, they all continued to report to their original congressional committees.

Ultimately, this fractured reporting process complicates the reauthorization process. Why do eight committee chairs have to work together to authorize a single department?

In addition, Congress' impracticable way of organizing its jurisdiction lends itself to producing an oversight process that is duplicative and contradictory.

For example, the Homeland Security Committees could provide guidance to the Department of Homeland Security on how ports or border crossings should be improved. The Agriculture, Finance, Judiciary and other committees, however, could have completely different opinions, forcing Homeland Security to reconcile multiple views from Congress.

Not only does this harm Homeland Security operations, it lessens the impact of congressional oversight.

Further, because the department reports to around 100 committees and subcommittees, it spends countless work hours and millions of dollars testifying before Congress on its progress and status.

This repetitive and wasteful habit must be eliminated in order to allow the department to return to its primary mission of protecting the homeland.

In order to resolve the oversight conflict, the Department of Homeland Security's reporting system must be streamlined.

The department should only report to six congressional committees: the House and Senate Homeland Security, Intelligence and Appropriations Committees. In doing so, Homeland Security would be following the model of the Department of Defense.

After all, it's a bit ridiculous that Homeland Security, which has a budget one-tenth the size of the Department of Defense, currently reports to over three times as many committees.

The current Department of Homeland Security oversight structure that Congress has in place prioritizes politics over security. Countless bipartisan organizations and individuals

have acknowledged that the prevailing system is outdated and only remains in existence to satisfy narrow parochial interests.

As such, it is pivotal that these power politics are put aside in order to protect the interests of the American people.

Streamlining congressional oversight would allow both Congress and the Department of Homeland Security to function more efficiently, and the U.S. homeland will be safer because of it. {eoa}

David Inserra specializes in cyber and homeland security policy, including protection of critical infrastructure, as policy analyst in The Heritage Foundation's Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies. **Max Morrison** is a member of the Young Leaders Program at The Heritage Foundation.

This article was originally published at . Used with permission.