Senate confirmation hearing for Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf reveals bipartisan support

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After ignoring a subpoena to appear before a congressional committee last week, Acting US Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf appeared before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Wednesday morning to answer questions as part of the confirmation process. The Senate panel is expected to vote September 30 to recommend that Wolf be made the permanent head of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), paving the way for his approval by the full Senate.

The less than two-hour long hearing was notable more for what was not said than what was said. Not a single Democratic senator voiced opposition to Wolf's confirmation, despite near-daily revelations of unconstitutional and illegal arrests, as well as physical, sexual and mental abuses committed by DHS agents against immigrants and asylum seekers, including children, in detention facilities throughout the country.

Wolf has been serving as acting head of the DHS since November 2019. The Senate had previously approved him for the position of DHS undersecretary for strategy, before President Trump elevated him to fill the vacancy at the head of the department created by the removal of Kevin McAleenan.

DHS, with an annual budget of over $50 billion, is the third largest cabinet department in the US government. Over 240,000 personnel are spread across 22 departments and agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Protection (CPB) and the US Marshals Service.

As acting head of the massive apparatus for repression, Wolf personally oversaw the deployment of federal police and paramilitary forces into Portland, Oregon this summer—over the public opposition of the elected leadership of the city and the state—to crack down on daily protests against police violence that began in the aftermath of the Memorial Day slaying of George Floyd by Minneapolis police.

In the course of the occupation of downtown Portland by the federal police forces, DHS agents carried out kidnappings of protesters, who were bundled into unmarked vehicles and secreted to locations where they were held without charges and interrogated for hours on end before being released. In previous congressional testimony, Wolf called this police state practice "a common de-escalation tactic."

Nor did anyone on the committee raise the September 4 assassination of Portland protester Michael Reinoehl by a taskforce led by US Marshals. At the urging of Donald Trump, the specially assembled task force assassinated the unarmed Reinoehl, who had previously confided to reporters in an interview that he was being "hunted" by far-right forces and the police.

Eyewitness testimony attested that Reinoehl was fired on by agents after being confronted as he was walking to his car. His death came hours after an arrest warrant had been issued pertaining to his role in the killing of far-right Patriot Prayer member Aaron "Jay" Danielson during an armed pro-Trump rally on August 29.

Wolf has overseen the imprisonment of thousands of immigrants, including children, in deadly ICE detention facilities. In addition to appalling reports of forced sterilizations, at least seven people have died in ICE detention centers this year from COVID-19. The latest victim was 61-year-old Cipriano Chavez-Alvarez, who

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died on Monday. Eunice Cho, a senior staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, said the death of Chavez-Alvarez was “entirely preventable and foreseeable.”

The senators on the committee spent a majority of their allotted time thanking Wolf for “his service to the country,” with several urging their colleagues to move forward with the nomination process as soon as possible. This the Republican chairman, Senator Ron Johnson (Wisconsin), pledged to do.

Johnson set the tone for the proceedings, expressing appreciation for Wolf and the “enormous challenges” his department has faced, including dealing with “protests which have turned into riots.” Johnson’s false characterization of the overwhelmingly peaceful protests went unchallenged by any of the senators.

After Johnson ended his gushing praise of Wolf and the Trump administration, the ranking Democrat on the committee, Senator Gary Peters (Michigan), questioned Wolf on the whistle-blower complaint filed by Brian Murphy, former head of intelligence analysis at the DHS. Murphy has alleged that Wolf withheld intelligence reports that reflected negatively on the Trump administration, including that Russia was interfering in the elections to denigrate Joe Biden, and that the DHS was downplaying the threat of white supremacists and “white nationalist domestic terrorism,” while exaggerating the role of alleged terrorists infiltrating through the southern border.

Peters presented a chart titled “Domestic Extremist Related Murders in the US,” covering January 2010 through August 2020. The chart presented data from the Anti-Defamation League showing that 345 murders, or 77 percent of all “extremist related murders” that have occurred over the past decade, were attributed to “white supremacist, anti-Semitic, anti-government and related ideologies.” This was followed by “domestic Islamist extremism,” which accounted for 86 murders, followed by “anarchists, environment, animal rights, black nationalist and related ideologies,” which accounted for only 16 murders, or less than two a year.

Wolf acknowledged that from “a lethality standpoint,” the most “persistent and lethal threat is white supremacist domestic terrorism.” But he quickly added, “It’s important that when we talk about domestic violent extremists, especially in the last four months, that we include the anti-government, anarchist, anti-law enforcement folks.”

Peters readily agreed with Wolf’s assessment and then transitioned to Murphy’s allegations as they pertain to supposed election interference by the Russian government against Joe Biden, seeking to revive the Democrats’ discredited anti-Russia witch hunt.

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