



Thursday not only on the topic of a widely publicized House of Representatives committee hearing — the radicalization of American Muslims — but also on the man who'll wield the gavel.

Some elected officials, civil liberties groups and American Muslim organizations fear that Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., the chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, will preside over an inflammatory inquiry akin to former Sen. Joseph McCarthy's infamous 1950s "witch hunt" investigations into communist anti-American activities.

Others, however, including top officials of the Obama administration, say there's a real threat to U.S. security from domestic terrorists, in particular from Muslims attracted to jihad, and that investigating that threat is a legitimate task for Congress.

What happens in King's hearing, the first in a series, and its impact on the American people will depend largely upon how King — a blunt, media-savvy, 10-term conservative Republican — handles it.

"It's a very touchy subject because of the legacy of 9-11 and because of efforts of President Bush and President Obama to play down the antagonism or suspicions of many Americans towards Muslims," said Bruce Buchanan, a University of Texas political science professor. "How this plays out, of course, hinges upon how Mr. King conducts the hearings. Bottom line, this has the potential to exacerbate those feelings rather than relieve them."

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