

Opening Statement for Dr. Coburn

“DHS at 10 Years: A Progress Report on Management”

HSGAC Hearing—Thursday, March 21, 2013

This week’s 10th anniversary of DHS is an appropriate time for Congress to be reviewing DHS’s mission and management, and set a clear course for the next decade.

I look forward to hearing from Deputy Secretary Lute and the Comptroller General today. I am also eager to hear from our second panel of witnesses, including Mr. Reese from the Congressional Research Service. I was interested to read his recent report which stated that—“ten years after September 11, 2011 terrorist attacks, “the U.S. government does not have a single definition for ‘homeland security.’”¹

As members of this committee know, I strongly believe in the need for Congressional oversight. Under Chairman Carper’s leadership, we plan to conduct a top to bottom review of DHS over the next four years. And today’s look at DHS management and the GAO high-risk list is a good place to start.

Improving the management of DHS relies on a shared commitment between Congress and DHS to clearly define the homeland security mission as it exists today and to prioritize the use of taxpayer funds to achieve that mission as efficiently and effectively as possible.

With limited resources and a national debt of nearly \$17 trillion, we simply cannot afford not to establish clear priorities for the department. Fortunately, several of these priorities can be found right in the Constitution itself. In the Constitution, we see the fundamental reason we need a federal government is “providing for the common defense” and to “secure the blessings of liberty”. Consistent with these responsibilities, we need to focus DHS on the clear national security threats facing our nation—including counter-terrorism, border security, and maritime security. It also includes preparing for and preventing clear threats like nuclear and biological terrorism.

¹ Shawn Reese, “Defining Homeland Security: Analysis and Congressional Considerations,” Congressional Research Service R42462, January 8, 2013. sreese@crs.loc.gov

Once these priorities are in place, we must look at DHS's programs to determine which are focused on them, and which are not. We simply can't afford to fund forever programs that are not focused on clear national security threats.

The recent budget sequester is a valuable test of whether Congress and DHS can work together to focus DHS's mission and resources on these national security priorities. I strongly believe there are plenty of wasteful and low-priority areas to cut the agency's budget before we cut its core missions. By working together, conducting tough but fair oversight, we should have no problem agreeing on what these are.

What we should avoid is cutting essential security missions if low-priority areas have not been cut first. It was simply unacceptable to hear that ICE has released thousands of detained illegal immigrants due to the threat of a looming sequester that had not even kicked in yet.

This morning, I want to hear from Ms. Lute how DHS plans to move forward with the budget sequester in a manner that does not jeopardize our national security. I also look forward to hearing from other witnesses on concrete steps that the Congress and DHS need to take to implement needed management reforms.

Thank you. I look forward to both panels' testimony.