

Opening Statement of Senator Tom Coburn
“The Homeland Security Department’s Budget Submission for Fiscal Year 2014”
April 17, 2013

Thank you. Madam Secretary, welcome. I appreciate your service – we have a lot to go through today.

I’m one of the few members of Congress who has supported your idea of consolidating Homeland Security grant programs, and I commend you on that. You’ll have my help on working towards that, with the caveat that we do a much better job in terms of putting metrics on those grants, and that they are truly risk-based. There are a lot of areas where we are not effective with homeland security grants today.

I would like to offer a few comments.

First, if you read the Constitution and you look at the enumerated powers, a lot of what we’ve done isn’t our role—it’s the state and locals’ role. We’ve created some learned dependency out there that individual states and communities are going to have to free themselves of, because the budget parameters are not going to allow us to be the source for what they need.

Secondly, we cannot spend enough money to give us a one hundred percent guarantee of security.

Thirdly, we cannot and should not get security to the level that we compromise our liberty. So we have those two tensions that we must deal with going forward.

I have to say, I do trust you in terms of your vision of trying to do the best to balance those tensions. And I look forward to working with you so that we can move more of these dollars to risk-based prevention programs, rather than parochial-based formulas. Most of the people in this room don’t always know about the fights that we have at mark-ups when parochial interests displace the primacy of risk-based needs. There’s nothing wrong with fighting for your state, but there’s plenty wrong when you have fought for your state and resources which could have been used to prevent something aren’t available at the highest risk places.

Finally, the last point I’d make with this large budget is that sequestration is going to stay. That level of funding is not going up. We are not going to go back on the pledge to the American people to trim down the size of the federal government. Some of the positive things that are coming out of sequestration are innovation, judgment, and making hard decisions. My wish would be that the president would ask us for more flexibility. He’s refused to do so, but I think eventually we’re going to see that request.

My hope, Madam Secretary, is that Congress is going to give the Department of Homeland Security more flexibility, so the agency can actually make the judgments that we’re paying you to make.

With all of that comes the very thing that every family in this country is doing: they're doing more with less, instead of less with more. The number one charge to your agency is to do more with less. And that's across this government. It's going to have to happen. It's the only way we create a future for the generations that follow us. So I look forward to your testimony.

Thank you.