



**TESTIMONY OF ELAINE C. DUKE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

September 18, 2008

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Voinovich and members of the Committee. It's my pleasure to appear before you today for the first time as the Under Secretary for Management in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). I especially want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to highlight the actions the Department of Homeland Security is taking to ensure we are completely prepared before the election through the inauguration and beyond.

In January 2009, the Federal government will undergo a transition from one Administration to the next. Historically, we know terrorists perceive government transitions to be periods of increased vulnerability. The attacks in Madrid in 2004, in London in 2005, and in Glasgow in 2007 all took place during transitions. The first World Trade Center attack in 1993, as well as the September 11th attacks occurred within the first year of new Administrations. At DHS, we are doing everything necessary to ensure we are prepared for the upcoming Presidential transition and that there will be no gaps in our leadership team, planning efforts, or mission success.

Our employees and military members will continue their vital efforts to protect our country today, tomorrow and right throughout the transition without hesitation. However, we are taking this time to focus on, and improve, our day-to-day business operations as well as to maximize our readiness and incident response capabilities.

The Department's transition efforts have garnered a great deal of attention, both inside and outside the Department. Inside the Department, we have been busy ensuring a seamless transition will occur. We are reviewing and making changes to our internal processes. We are preparing briefing and confirmation materials for the incoming Administration. We are conducting training and exercises to ensure the leadership in place is prepared for any threat. We are focused on change management and communicating our plans to our employees.

Today's hearing on our progress is a fine example of our efforts to inform and work with stakeholders and partners outside the Department. Moreover, we are working with our government partners with respect to security clearances, exercises, and inter-agency coordination. We are working with independent experts such as the National Academy of Public Administration, the Council for Excellence in Government, and the Homeland Security Advisory Council to ensure that our transition efforts are properly focused.

Our transition efforts actually began in the Spring of 2007. By this time last year, we were identifying critical positions that support component priorities and using our own Critical Position Succession Planning template to ensure a pipeline of successors to critical positions, which are viewed as corporate assets and monitored on a regular basis. As part of this process, components identified senior career civil servants who will assume responsibility for political positions during the time of transition. Components have identified key competencies needed for success in these positions, assessed successor pools, prepared development plans, assessed our ability to recruit externally, and identified critical positions that are vacant or have high succession risk.

In September 2007, Secretary Chertoff asked the Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC) to establish an Administration Transition Task Force to provide recommendations and best practices to the Department. The members shared their knowledge and experience in leading change and managing transitions within their own public and private organizations. The Task Force also engaged public and private sector subject matter experts involved in organizational transformations and transitions.

The Task Force made several recommendations and grouped their recommendations into seven categories: Threat Awareness, Leadership, Congressional Oversight/Action, Policy, Operations, Succession and Training. Although they did not rank their recommendations within each category, they did indicate that all their recommendations "constitute national imperatives and must be expeditiously implemented."

Some of the Task Force's recommendations that are under the "Congressional Oversight and Action" section, and certain others in the report, are not within the Department's ability to implement, such as recommendations to consider and expeditiously approve the new Administration's Secretary of Homeland Security, or to implement the 9/11 Commission recommendation to reduce from 86 the number of Congressional oversight committees and subcommittees claiming some jurisdiction over the Department. The Department is encouraged by these recommendations and looks forward to Congress taking them into consideration for implementation. We took the Task Force's recommendations to heart and have incorporated many of them into our current planning process. For instance, we are taking full advantage of the period between now and November 2008 as an important time to establish and standardize processes and procedures.

We also organized a cadre of individuals focused on transition. Our cadre consists of Senior and Deputy Transition Officers who are working closely with my core transition team to evaluate internal processes, develop briefing materials to ensure operational effectiveness during the

anticipated surge of incoming and exiting employees, and develop and implement a training exercise plan.

In November 2007, we joined Congress in requesting that the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) prepare an independent report on our transition planning efforts. We asked NAPA to provide a frank assessment of where we stand and areas where we need to improve. We welcomed the report's findings, which noted that the Academy Panel was "pleased ... that the department has taken some steps to help it to be well positioned for the transition." The NAPA report also made several important recommendations, most of which we have either implemented or will implement prior to the transition.

For example, we have now established a transition plan for our components, ensuring that the top leadership in each component includes career executives who will preserve continuity of operations before, during and after the administration transition. Of our 22 component agencies and program offices, 14 have career Civil Servants in the number one or number two positions while seven component agencies or program offices have only career civil servants in senior leadership positions.

We are also providing improved processes to equip new appointees with the tools they need as well as the information and relationships required to be effective in their jobs. To lead this effort, we have appointed Coast Guard Rear Admiral John Acton to serve as our full-time transition director.

But, as the report notes, it is critical that "to the greatest extent possible, incoming DHS leadership – including the Secretary and key staff – must be in place on Inauguration Day or shortly thereafter." This would require swift action by the new Administration as well as Congress.

In December 2007, the Department focused efforts at the interagency level by engaging with the Council on Excellence in Government (CEG). Emphasis for CEG will be on the Department's homeland security training and intergovernmental interactions with other federal, state and local governments. We asked CEG to establish a small bi-partisan panel of experienced practitioners and experts to help channel this work.

In concert with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other parts of DHS, the Council support our training and exercise plans. With these exercises, inter-agency participants will not only practice their roles but also build working relationships and rapport with other key decision makers in a variety of emergency scenarios. This effort will strengthen participants' knowledge of national homeland security protocols and interfaces with other departments as well as state, local, and tribal governments to ensure that we are collectively prepared.

In May of this year, we held a DHS Senior Career Leaders Transition Readiness Conference at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Ga., to prepare the Department for the changeover. Approximately 100 senior career employees attended a three-day conference which included remarks from Deputy Secretary Paul Schneider, presentations from various offices, team-building activities, and a table-top exercise. We made major progress during this conference in furthering cross-organizational and cross-functional relationships that will carry us

well beyond the transition. To offer the public an inside view of the DHS transition preparations, we even brought a CNN reporter to cover the conference.

Transition handbooks will be developed for major programs and significant operational areas. Each handbook will address top priorities, key challenges and issues relevant to the identified program or operational area. The handbooks will provide a “nuts and bolts” approach to address all of the items that must be transitioned from one leadership team to another during the 2009 administration change. The handbooks will also cover records management to ensure necessary documents are retained and accessible.

Because more than 99 percent of the Department’s 216,000 employees are career employees or military members, and not political appointees, I believe the change in administration will have little, if any, impact on our critical frontline operations. Our employees will continue to seamlessly do their jobs as they do now, protecting our country every day.

Thank you for your leadership and continued support of the Department of Homeland Security and its management programs. I look forward to working together with you in shaping the future and success of DHS with energy and enthusiasm. I am honored to be here today, and welcome the opportunity answer any questions you may have.