

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Nomination of Kirstjen M. Nielsen to be Secretary, U.S. Department of
Homeland Security**

November 8, 2017

Ranking Member Claire McCaskill

Opening Statement

Thank you Mr. Chairman, I appreciate you holding this hearing and I want to thank the nominee for her willingness to serve.

Today we convene to perform one of our most important constitutional functions – to provide advice and consent for the President’s nominees for senior positions in our government. On October 16, 2017, President Trump nominated Ms. Nielsen to lead the Department of Homeland Security. The agency’s mission is to ensure that our homeland is safe, secure, and resilient against terrorism, natural disasters, and other hazards facing the nation.

Recent events have only reinforced the need for the Department of Homeland Security to have strong permanent leadership. American citizens in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and other regions have had their lives and livelihoods upended by hurricanes. Out west, raging wildfires have forced thousands of families from their homes. Record-breaking floods have ravaged communities across my home state of Missouri. And just last week, New York City suffered its most deadly terrorist attack since 9/11. In times of crisis, the

American people come together. DHS plays a critical role in ensuring that the federal government supports that effort.

If confirmed as Secretary, Ms. Nielsen will lead the third largest department in the federal government, oversee a workforce that includes more than 240,000 employees and contractors, and coordinate 22 separate components including Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Coast Guard, and the Secret Service.

While I was already aware of Ms. Nielsen's intellect and work ethic as well as her expertise in cyber security and preparedness, I appreciated the chance to discuss the other qualities she would bring to DHS in our meeting yesterday. My hope is that today's hearing will explore some of the challenges currently facing DHS and that will confront her if confirmed. For example, I look forward to learning how Ms. Nielsen plans to improve the Department's counterterrorism capabilities despite the dramatic cuts included in the President's budget. I want to know what steps Ms. Nielsen will take to stop the illegal flow of drugs and contraband through our ports of entry. I would like to hear how Ms. Nielsen has and will apply lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina and recent disasters to improve oversight of DHS contracting practices in crisis situations. I also hope

that Ms. Nielsen will share her priorities for counteracting violent extremism and for protecting our cyber and election infrastructure from foreign actors.

Perhaps most importantly, I want to learn about the management experience and philosophy that Ms. Nielsen plans to bring to DHS. No one that's served as DHS Secretary has had perfect knowledge of the breadth and depth of issues facing the department. But the DHS Secretary must have the leadership and management skills to lead a complex and sprawling enterprise on day one. I hope that Ms. Nielsen will discuss her strategies for promoting collaboration and efficiency among the various components within the agency and with other federal partners. I also want know how Ms. Nielsen will build employee morale and ensure that whistleblowers can come forward to management, Congress and the Inspector General to report waste, fraud and abuse, without fear of retaliation.

Finally, I hope to receive a public commitment from Ms. Nielsen that DHS will comply with oversight requests from all members of this Committee, including several of mine that remain outstanding. Ms. Nielsen's predecessor, General John Kelly, was willing to speak frankly, even if his message was not one that would be particularly well received. Under his leadership DHS was willing to answer requests for information from both the majority and the minority—and, while not perfect, was far more responsive than other Departments. We have a constitutional duty to perform oversight of the Department, and I would like to

continue and improve upon the cooperation that General Kelly showed to the majority and minority members of this Committee.

The Department of Homeland Security is comprised of thousands of talented and dedicated Americans who work every day to keep us safe. They develop and implement counterterrorism and cybersecurity policy. They defend our border and ports of entry. They administer our immigration laws, protect of our national leaders and critical infrastructure, and execute disaster preparedness and response.

We must continue to ensure that these public servants have the support necessary to succeed in their mission and I look forward to working with Ms. Nielsen in that effort should she be confirmed as our nation's sixth Secretary of Homeland Security.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.