

U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

“Threats to the Homeland”

October 10, 2018

Ranking Member Claire McCaskill

Opening Statement

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Nielsen, Director Wray and Acting Director Travers, thank you for being here today. And thank you for the hard work that you and the brave women and men of DHS, the FBI and the National Counterterrorism Center do every single day to keep Americans safe.

I hope to hear from you today about some of the dangerous and emerging threats that we are facing, and what we can do to stop and prevent them.

Both in my state and across the country, one of the greatest threats we have faced over the past few years is the opioid epidemic. As I have said before, the opioid epidemic is certainly a public health crisis, but now it has *also* become a border security crisis. The border may seem far from Missouri, but the opioid epidemic is now being fueled by dangerous drugs that transnational criminal organizations smuggle into our country both across our Southern border and through our mail.

Earlier this year, I released a series of reports from the minority staff of this committee analyzing efforts taken by the Department of Homeland Security to stem this crisis. The reports' findings were ominous. The seizures of illicit fentanyl, an extremely potent and often fatal opioid, by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are increasing dramatically. Despite this, DHS has failed to adequately resource the ports of entry where the overwhelming majority of these opioids enter the country.

The Southern border is not the only location where DHS seizes opioids. Traffickers also smuggle narcotics into the country through the mail; in fact, our report found that mail facilities have the largest number of individual CBP seizures of opioids. Even though the Postal Service alone, apart from carriers like Fed Ex and UPS, processes more than 1.3 million packages every day, we have fewer than 400 overworked Port Officers to inspect them. And sure enough, just last week, the DHS Inspector General found that QUOTE "CBP's international air mail inspection is not effective to stop illegal drugs from entering the United States." I'm very glad, Secretary Nielsen, that CBP has agreed with the IG's recommendation to conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine what additional staff and resources are necessary to adequately address the threat from opioids in the mail. I look forward to seeing that analysis when it is completed and working with you to quickly fix the problem.

In addition to the threat posed by criminal smugglers and traffickers, we also face threats online. Nearly everyone recognizes that Russia interfered in the 2016 election. And there's no reason to expect this sort of interference to just go away in the future. DHS isn't responsible for administering elections, of course, but it does offer support to our state and local election officials to help strengthen and secure their systems. As we are now less than four weeks from the midterm elections, with early voting already underway in several states, I hope to hear an update from Director Wray and Secretary Nielsen about the nature of the threat and their confidence that our systems and personnel are prepared to handle it.

Hackers can do more than just interfere with election systems, of course. DHS and the FBI issued a startling alert in March putting critical infrastructure owners and operators on notice that the Russian government was targeting a number of sectors including energy, nuclear, water, and aviation. Just last week, the Justice Department charged seven Russian intelligence officers with conducting cyberattacks against anti-doping agencies, athletes and others in retaliation for their opposition to Russia's state-sponsored doping program. A witness at one of our hearings just last month testified that this new era is akin to cyber trench warfare. All this hostile activity takes place in that gray space where an act of aggression from an adversary won't elicit a formal, aggressive response. But we need to do more to deter and prevent this type of behavior in the first place.

There unfortunately isn't enough time to discuss in an opening statement—or even a single hearing—all of the threats that our country faces. That's why I'm glad that the Chairman held a hearing last month on the evolving threats that we face, such as threats from drones or the vulnerability of our cyber supply chain. And I think the Chairman would agree that when our Committee has been alerted to a new threat, we've worked in a bipartisan manner to address it. Just last week, two bills the Chairman and I worked on closely together passed the Senate, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Act, and our countering drones bill, which the President just signed into law. Both of those measures will go a long ways towards arming agencies with the tools they need to keep Americans safe.

So I am glad to have all of you here today to talk about the threats America currently faces, what we are doing about them, and what Congress can do to help. Thank you.