

Statement of Jeh Charles Johnson
before the
U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
on His Nomination to Serve as
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security
November 13, 2013

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Coburn, and Senators of this Committee, thank you for scheduling this hearing to evaluate my nomination.

Senator Menendez and Senator Booker, thank you for taking time out of your schedules to be here for me, and for your generous words.

I'd also like to introduce my family: my wife, Dr. Susan DiMarco, my son Jeh Charles Johnson, Jr., and my daughter Natalie Johnson. As the public officials here know, the burdens of office are made lighter by the support and engagement of your family.

I am honored by the trust and confidence President Obama has placed in me when he nominated me to be Secretary of Homeland Security. I also appreciate the letters of support addressed to the Committee from the law enforcement organizations, retired senior military officers, and former officials of both the Bush and Obama Administrations.

I respectfully submit that I am ready, willing and able to lead the Department of Homeland Security.

I have experience in law enforcement. As a federal prosecutor in New York, I worked with law enforcement officers of the Secret Service, what was then called the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the FBI, the DEA, and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.

I have experience as a key member of the management team of a large and complex government agency. For 27 months, I was part of the senior management team of the Department of the Air Force. For four years, I was part of the senior management team of the Department of Defense. During that time, I sat at the right hand of, learned from, and supported two outstanding Secretaries of Defense, Robert Gates and Leon Panetta.

At the same time, as the senior lawyer in the Department of Defense, I led a legal community of over 10,000 civilian and military lawyers.

During the four years of President Obama's first term, I was at the center of the development and execution of many of this Administration's counterterrorism policies.

Last year I worked closely with Secretary Panetta, as he coordinated the Department of Defense's contributions to the response to Hurricane Sandy.

The missions of DHS are to:

- (1) prevent terrorism and enhance security;
- (2) secure and manage our borders;
- (3) enforce and administer our immigration laws;
- (4) safeguard and secure cyberspace; and
- (5) ensure resilience to disasters.

If confirmed, I will vigorously pursue all of these missions -- they represent the most basic and important services a government can provide for its people.

If confirmed, I will work to reinforce, among all the men and women of the Department, the common, unifying mission that binds them together --homeland security.

If confirmed, I pledge to be a champion for every man and woman of the Department of Homeland Security, and their families. I will mourn the death of any man or woman in the Department, including those killed in the line of duty, like TSA Officer Hernandez on November 1.

Those at the Department of Defense know that I worked hard to earn the respect of all the men and women in uniform, from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and our four-star combatant commanders, to the more junior officers and enlisted personnel who risked their lives in special operations. My family and I spent Thanksgiving 2010 at a military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany. I spent Thanksgiving 2012 with the troops at a remote command outpost in Afghanistan, in the mountains near Pakistan. I was honored when an elite team of Navy Seals attended my farewell at the Pentagon.

If confirmed, I will devote time and attention to the management issues that I know DHS faces. As this Committee knows, there are leadership vacancies within DHS of alarming proportions. As I speak, the department of government charged with the vital mission of homeland security has no Secretary, no Deputy Secretary, and a number of other senior positions are vacant. If confirmed as Secretary, my immediate priority, starting the day I take the oath, will be to work with the White House and the Senate to fill the remainder of these key leadership positions.

The other management challenges faced by DHS are also well known to this Committee. If confirmed, I intend to continue the progress toward unqualified, audited financial statements. I will work to get DHS off the GAO "High Risk" list. I will be a hawk when it comes to identifying fraud, waste and abuse in the use of taxpayer dollars.

If confirmed, I pledge not to shrink from difficult or controversial decisions. Those at the Pentagon and in the field know my track record in this regard -- ranging from politically-charged matters of personnel policy to the legality of lethal force.

If confirmed, I will work to implement all legislation enacted into law. Like President Obama, many in Congress, the business community and most of the American public, I support comprehensive, common-sense immigration reform. If reform is enacted into law, I will work to prepare DHS to administer the changes in law and ensure that DHS has the staff, resources and capability to do so.

If confirmed, I intend to be transparent with the American people about our efforts on their behalf. While the senior lawyer for the Department of Defense I made the extra effort to publicly explain and defend U.S. national security policies, including in speeches at the Heritage Foundation in October 2011 and the Oxford Union in November 2012. I supported the declassification of the military's counterterrorism efforts in Yemen and Somalia, in the War Powers report submitted by the President to Congress in June 2012.

And, if confirmed, I pledge transparency and candor with Congress. Those of you from the Armed Services Committee know that these are not just words for me. Here again, I have a track record. From Secretaries Gates and Panetta, I learned that a little bipartisan candor goes a long way, and promotes good will among all of us who came to Washington for the common purpose of serving the Nation.

I have tremendous respect for the United States Senate and its prerogatives. Thirty-five years ago I worked in this very building as a summer intern for Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. I was an impressionable 20-year-old college student then. All summer, I sat in a back office with the Senator's press secretary, Tim Russert, clipping press, literally, running errands, and researching legislation. The experience was exciting and formative, and it did much to inspire my public service.

There is another thing that motivates me to leave private life one more time to accept this particular assignment.

In my family photo album is a childhood picture of me and my sister standing next to my Dad's red 1966 Buick convertible in what was then the public parking lot in front of the U.S. Capitol. The most striking thing about the photo is that our car is parked just a few feet away from the steps to the eastern front of the Capitol building. I look at the photo today and realize that it captures a period in our history that is probably lost in my lifetime, and perhaps forever.

September 11 and other terrorist attacks here changed all that. As I said in the Rose Garden on October 18, I am a New Yorker and September 11 happens to be my birthday. I was present in Manhattan then and was an eyewitness to the events of that day. I know the shock and the potential for death and destruction that a breach of our homeland security can cause. I also recall the sinking feeling of guilt and uselessness that I personally felt, in the face of that tragedy, because I had left public service at the Pentagon just eight months before.

September 11 changed millions of us, it changed me, and it motivates me to answer this call to lead the men and women of the Department of Homeland Security.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.