

Opening Statement of Governor Kristi Noem for Nomination as Secretary of the U.S.

Department of Homeland Security

Good morning, Chairman Paul, Ranking Member Peters, and distinguished members of the committee. I am honored to appear before you today as the nominee for Secretary of Homeland Security. I want to thank President-Elect Donald J. Trump for his confidence in my leadership, and the people of South Dakota for their fantastic support throughout my time in public service. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Senator Cramer, who has been an invaluable source of wisdom throughout this process as he accompanied me to many meetings; and my friend, the Majority Leader of this esteemed body, Senator Thune, for their generous support this morning.

I'm a wife, mother, a grandmother, a farmer, a rancher, a businesswoman, and a governor. I have spent my life in rural America. I understand what it means to work hard every day to build a better future for our kids and our communities. I come before you today with a deep sense of responsibility and humility as the nominee to lead the Department of Homeland Security – and a commitment to the more than 330 million Americans whom we both serve to keep them safe and secure in their homes, their communities and their country.

Before I proceed, I want to introduce my husband Bryon, who is here with me today. He is my 24/7 reminder that our dedication to public service is not a solo effort or result.

Securing our homeland is a serious, sacred trust that must be relentlessly pursued and can never be taken for granted. Being safe within our borders is an American right, yet Americans feel less safe than they have in decades. For the first time in 30 years, more than 40% of Americans are afraid to walk alone at night within a mile of their home.

President-Elect Trump is going to change that.

I have seen firsthand the challenges and opportunities facing our great nation. In the 20 years since the Department of Homeland Security was formed, the nature of the threats

to our homeland has grown and evolved. This Department was created in response to the failures across government that led to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. That reality is not lost on me, especially in the wake of the recent terrorist attacks over New Year's.

I have led South Dakota for the last 6 years with a focus every day on making our state safer, stronger, and freer. I have focused every day on making the best decisions not just for right now, but for generations to come. I have overseen a state budget of over \$7 billion and a state employee workforce of more than 13,000, including more than 7,000 reporting to the Governor. I have addressed important issues like cybersecurity, human trafficking, drug interdiction, and natural disasters – the same challenges facing so many of you here and the people you represent back at home. I have secured our state and supported the rule of law. If confirmed as the 8th Secretary, that is the same approach I will take to leading the Department of Homeland Security.

As we face the evolving threats of the 21st century, the mission and success of DHS is more critical than ever. We must be vigilant, proactive, and innovative to protect the homeland. The challenges before us are significant. We must secure our borders against illegal trafficking and immigration. And we must safeguard our critical infrastructure against cyberattacks, respond to natural disasters, and combat terrorism.

I firmly believe that we can meet these challenges head-on with resolve, innovation, and collaboration with Federal and state partners. And Senators, I want your input.

Border security must remain a top priority. As a nation, we have the right and responsibility to secure our borders against those who would do us harm. And we must create a fair and lawful immigration system that is efficient and effective and that reflects our values. President Trump

was elected with a clear mandate to achieve this mission. Two thirds of Americans support his immigration and border policies, including a majority of Latino Americans. I was the first Governor to send National Guard troops to Texas when they were being

overwhelmed by an unprecedented border crisis. If confirmed as Secretary, I will ensure that our exceptional, extraordinary Border Patrol agents have ALL the tools, resources, and support they need to carry out their mission effectively. The same is true of my commitment to the outstanding men and women of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. They are responsible for apprehending, detaining, and deporting illegal immigrants. Getting criminal aliens off the streets and out of the country will help make American communities safe again. The bravery and dedication of the Border Patrol and ICE are unmatched, and I will restore dignity to their work.

The rising threat of cyberattacks also demands our utmost attention. Our critical infrastructure, from energy grids to financial systems, is under constant attack by foreign adversaries and criminal actors. As Secretary, I will prioritize a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to cybersecurity.

In fact, in the months to follow, we have to think and plan bigger, faster and smarter. I fully acknowledge that we in Washington do not have all the answers. Therefore, I will leverage public-private partnerships and advance cutting-edge, state-of-the-art technologies to protect our nation's digital landscape. I have a proven track record doing this in South Dakota. I have helped make Dakota State University a global leader in cybersecurity education because we recognize the need to address this emerging threat. I will take this proactive approach if given the opportunity to serve as Secretary.

President-elect Trump has been a tremendous friend to law enforcement, and I will do the same in the role of Secretary. As Governor, I have worked closely with law enforcement to make South Dakota safer. I have overseen the roughly 200 state troopers in the South Dakota Highway Patrol. On several occasions, I've convened groups of law enforcement from across our state to address policies that will make our people safer.

In fact, while some in this country were attacking law enforcement, we took the opposite approach. We recruited law enforcement officers to move to South Dakota, a state that respects their service and sacrifice. And we revamped our law enforcement training to provide the first ever state-led tribal-focused training opportunity.

We must remain vigilant against terrorism and against others who wish to do harm to our Country and its great people. I will ensure that our intelligence and law enforcement agencies are working together, hand-in-hand, fully equipped to detect, prevent, and respond to threats from radical ideologies or foreign adversaries.

This requires resources, coordination, and collaboration across all levels of government. Once again, I will seek your wisdom and your input in the months ahead. For the sake of the people we both represent, we must get this right.

I recognize that homeland security is not only about prevention but also about resilience. When disasters strike, as we know they will, the Department of Homeland Security must be ready to respond swiftly, efficiently, and effectively to protect the lives and property of Americans. As governor, I have worked with FEMA in response to a dozen natural disasters in South Dakota. These have included historic floods, tornados, blizzards, wildfires, a derecho, and even a global pandemic. As Secretary, I will enhance our emergency preparedness and strengthen FEMA's capabilities. We will ensure that no community is left behind and that life-saving services like electricity and water are quickly restored.

As Secretary, I will oversee the Secret Service, an agency that is in serious need of reform. We all saw the threats to President-elect Trump last year – and the consequences of failure. That should never happen again. I have worked closely with my own gubernatorial protective detail and am familiar with what works and what doesn't. And I will bring that experience towards strengthening our Secret Service once again.

I am committed to working with this committee, with Congress, and with the dedicated men and women of the Department of Homeland Security to fulfill our mission. Together, we can ensure that the United States remains a beacon of freedom, safety, security, and opportunity for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity and honor to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions. I hope to earn your trust and, hopefully, your vote as we embark on this critical work together.