

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
Nomination Hearing to Consider Kirstjen M. Nielsen to be Secretary,
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

November 8, 2017

America is facing enormous challenges. Our national debt exceeds \$20 trillion, and there is no serious effort being made — by either party — to significantly reduce the 30-year projected deficits that are currently expected to exceed \$100 trillion.

Our enemies are on the rise. Russia continues to destabilize its neighbors, and has partnered with Iran to increase both countries' influence in the Middle East. The Iranian Nuclear Agreement did modify Iran's behavior — for the worse. North Korea remains determined to develop the capability to target the United States with nuclear weapons. And the threat of Islamist terrorism has evolved, metastasized, and spread all over the world — including to our Homeland.

The challenges facing the next Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security are equally daunting.

We have just experienced unprecedented destruction caused by three hurricanes and multiple wild fires. DHS and FEMA, together with their budgets, are already stretched thin responding to these disasters.

As the use of the internet increases, so do the threats posed by social media inspired acts of terrorism, hacking and cyberattacks.

This committee has held more than 20 hearings laying out the sad reality that our borders are far from secure. As a result, illegal immigration persists, illicit drugs flow virtually unabated, and we are more vulnerable than we should be to external forces.

Unfortunately, enemies from within may currently pose the greatest danger. Five years ago, on August 5, 2012, evil struck in Oak Creek, Wisconsin when six worshippers were murdered at a Sikh temple. Since then, the list of mass killings has persistently and depressingly grown:

Dec. 14, 2012: 26 killed, two wounded at an elementary school in Sandy Hook, Connecticut.

April 15, 2013: Three killed, 264 wounded in a bombing at the Boston Marathon.

Sept. 16, 2013: 12 killed, eight wounded at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C.

April 2, 2014: Three killed, 12 wounded at Fort Hood, Texas, five years after an even deadlier shooting that took 13 lives and injured more than 30 others.

April 13, 2014: Three killed at a Jewish community center in Overland Park, Kansas.

May 23, 2014: Six killed, 14 wounded near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara.

May 17, 2015: Nine killed, 18 wounded in a motorcycle gang fight at a restaurant in Waco, Texas.

June 17, 2015: Nine killed, one wounded at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

July 16, 2015: Five killed, two wounded at a military recruiting center and a Naval Reserve center in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Oct. 1, 2015: Nine killed, nine wounded at the Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon.

Nov. 27, 2015: Three killed, nine wounded outside a clinic in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Dec. 2, 2015: 14 killed, 24 wounded at a Christmas party in San Bernardino, California.

June 12, 2016: 49 killed, at least 68 wounded at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

July 7, 2016: Five police officers killed, eleven wounded near a parking garage in Dallas, Texas.

July 17, 2016: Three police officers killed, and three more officers wounded at a shopping plaza in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Jan. 6, 2017: Five killed, six wounded at the airport in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Oct. 1, 2017: 58 killed, 546 wounded at a music festival in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Oct. 31, 2017: Eight killed, 12 wounded along a bicycle path in New York City.

Nov. 5, 2017, last Sunday: 26 killed, at least 20 wounded in the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas.

That evening, my 34 year-old daughter asked me the questions we are all asking ourselves: “What’s happening? Why? What can we do about it?”

Those are the questions the next DHS Secretary will be asked to address. It is not an easy task. The Department of Homeland Security employs approximately 240,000 people and manages a budget of \$66 billion. It’s a department created by fusing 22 separate agencies with diverse missions. The result has been a department that has struggled to unify its efforts and manage a workforce with habitually low morale relative to other federal agencies.

Fortunately, when Ms. Nielsen served under Secretary Kelly, she witnessed firsthand how quickly and dramatically morale can be improved within DHS by providing its workforce the authority and support they need to perform the tasks they were hired to do.

In my conversation with General Kelly, he called Ms. Nielsen a superstar. I have received a letter of endorsement from former DHS Secretaries Tom Ridge and Michael Chertoff, as well as a letter from 40 former White House and homeland security federal officials. I ask consent that these letters be entered in the record.

Ms. Nielsen, I thank you for your past service and your willingness to serve in the future.

I look forward to your testimony.