

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Claire McCaskill
Nomination Hearing for General John F. Kelly to be
Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
January 10, 2017**

As prepared for delivery:

Thank you, Chairman Johnson.

Today's hearing is the first full Committee hearing of the new Congress, and the Committee's first hearing on one of President-elect Trump's nominees. As members of the Committee and the Senate, we have a constitutional obligation to review the nominations made by the President and consent to their appointment. We are not here to participate in a partisan or a political exercise; we are here to fulfill the Senate's constitutional obligations as part of the orderly transfer of power to a new Administration.

General Kelly has answered the Committee's advance questions and provided all the information required for us to hold this hearing. General Kelly, welcome. Thank you for your past service to this country, and for being here today, willing to serve your country again.

You have been asked to serve as the fifth Secretary of Homeland Security. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has the tremendous responsibility to protect our homeland, both its people and its infrastructure. I plan today to ask as many questions as necessary to understand how you will address that responsibility, if confirmed.

At this moment in our history, I cannot emphasize enough the need to protect our critical infrastructure – whether that is electric grids, public transportation or power plants. We need to understand what steps you will take to defend our nation's critical infrastructure against intrusion and harm.

Our intelligence community, of which DHS is part, is among the finest in the world. It is made up of dedicated public servants, including members of our military. In order for these

people to do their job of protecting Americans in an increasingly challenging world, they need the support of our government, all the way to the top. I want to understand whether you will take intelligence seriously and engage with people whose job it is to give us good information so that we can make good decisions.

In your answers to the Committee's questions before this hearing, you said that drug demand in the United States is causing much of the violence in Central and South America, and that this violence is the major reason for the large number of people moving illegally from that area into the United States. The issues underlying border security are complex, but one thing is clear – many of the people coming across the border aren't trying to sneak in under the fence or evade the Border Patrol; they are seeking refuge from the incredible violence in their home countries. I know that your experience at Southcom will help you in developing a comprehensive, inclusive approach to addressing immigration and border issues.

I was also encouraged to see you discuss the necessity of engaging law enforcement, medical treatment and rehabilitation, and local communities in a comprehensive drug demand reduction campaign that includes addressing the opioid epidemic as a big driver of heroin use. If you are confirmed, I hope that this will remain at the top of your priority list.

Another major component of protecting the homeland is the Department's counterterrorism efforts. In today's environment, effective counterterrorism efforts require using existing and new technology, as well as other tools, to counter evolving adversaries across shifting geographic borders. I plan to ask how you will address this challenge in new and innovative ways. I also hope that you will employ the same thoughtful and multi-faceted approach to counterterrorism as in your proposal to address drug demand.

Recent events have shown us that terrorism has many faces. We have to get at root causes of extremism and also must ensure that people in our communities feel empowered to report concerns. I hope to hear from you today that you understand that our fight against violent extremism is not singular in its focus, and that you will fight against any narrative that encourages committing crimes against Americans based on hate.

As members of this Committee, we also have a Constitutional responsibility to conduct oversight of taxpayer dollars. I can tell you right now that if you are confirmed, when you come before Congress to seek funds from American taxpayers, you better be prepared to answer some tough questions. I am going to ask you about contracting and cost-benefits analyses. I am going to want to see Independent Government Cost Estimates, performance plans and real metrics. Decisions must be made on facts and data, not campaign promises.

I expect someone with your experience to be a strong leader. But even the best-managed federal agency has waste, fraud, and abuse. I believe that whistleblowers are essential to good government, and I have made it one of my missions to expand and enhance protections for them. I want to make sure that you understand that open lines of communication, responsiveness to employee concerns, and a swift response to retaliation are things I expect from agency leadership. I also encourage any whistleblowers to contact my office at whistleblowers@mccaskill.senate.gov if they have information to report.

I believe you will also take seriously the role of congressional oversight in your new role. I am glad that you have already agreed to work with me as Ranking Member of this committee because we have a lot of work to do. If you are confirmed, I look forward to continuing to build this relationship.

Our country is facing a difficult time, and we have difficult problems to solve. DHS needs good management and strong leadership. In your responses to the questionnaire and in our meeting before this hearing, you said that one of your greatest strengths as a leader is “speaking truth to power.” General Kelly, I think we all anticipate that you will need that in your next job, where you will have the responsibility and the obligation to speak truth to President-elect Trump, who has used some of his most extreme and divisive rhetoric about issues under DHS’ jurisdiction. Given your experience, I expect you to be up to that challenge. And if I think you are backing down, you will hear from me.

I thank you for being here today and I look forward to your testimony.