

U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

“Improving Border Security and Public Safety”

April 5, 2017

Ranking Member Claire McCaskill

Opening Statement

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Secretary Kelly, thank you so much for being here today.

We are cognoscente of the demands on your time and part of our goal is to be careful about what we ask for and how much we ask. But we have to ask questions, because our job is oversight. We're aware you're being pulled different ways. That's why we look forward to you getting a full team in play so we can begin to have some of the people in charge in your operation come and answer some of these difficult policy and oversight questions. You and I have worked together on the armed services committee. I am a fan of how you've served as a marine and a general and no one can question the sacrifices you've made for our nation. Ever since your confirmation, I have considered you to be a voice of reason within this administration. You have displayed, throughout your career, a willingness to speak truth to power, to say “no” rather than nodding, and have

made your decisions based on the facts—not political expediency. Those characteristics are needed now more than ever.

I am counting on you to speak truth to this administration and to the President, but I'm also asking you to speak to us and to the American people. Even though it may not seem like it—we are now three months into the new Administration. I know that you want time to settle in, and that you need help to do your job. We're pleased that we confirmed Elaine Duke yesterday. I think she will be a terrific addition to your department. And, by the way, I secured her vote tally, the original. I'll make sure I get that to her so she can have it to frame for her office.

We have had two executive orders that banned travel from Muslim-majority nations. The first was implemented without notice and caused chaos at our nation's airports. Both have come under immediate constitutional scrutiny by the courts. The Department has overhauled its interior enforcement, in the words of the White House, to “take the shackles off” Immigrations and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol. You have ordered the Department to “immediately begin planning, design, construction and maintenance of a wall along the border.” Even though Missouri isn't on the border, my state is directly affected by it. The drugs that get through the Mexican border have a huge impact on the opioid crisis that is gripping

my state and the entire nation. It is causing death and destruction to families all over the United States.

I know that you share my concern about the drugs coming over the border. But I am deeply concerned that all of the rhetoric and all of the budget requests have focused on the border and not the ports of entry and that there is no plan to increase resources at the ports of entry, which we know, along with the mail, is the primary place that drugs are coming into our country. I certainly hope that we have the chance to address that today.

Away from the border, I am concerned about the secret service; the unprecedented challenge of protecting the President and his family at numerous locations: The White House, Trump Tower and Mar-a-Lago, as well as international travel by the President's sons. In the meantime, the Secret Service is reviewing incidents that threatened the physical security of the White House, including a case in March where a fence-jumper was able to elude security and roamed the grounds for 15 minutes. I am deeply concerned that the Secret Service is being stretched to its breaking point.

And just yesterday, I read news reports that the "extreme vetting" procedures that the President has ordered could force visa applicants from places like Australia and Japan and the United Kingdom to disclose not only all the

information on their mobile phones, but also their social media passwords, financial records, and questions about their beliefs. I've got to tell you, if my family was travelling to the United Kingdom and they told me that we would have to answer questions about my beliefs to get into the country, we would not go! And I have a hard time imagining that those countries will see us as their friends. I think this has a profound impact on our standing in the world, a profound impact on the nature of our alliances around the world and a profound impact on our national security. And I will ask questions about that today as I indicated to you in our conversation yesterday. Because, I think we are doing things that don't trip up the bad guys, but changes our image in the eyes of the world forever, causing permanent and irreparable harm.

Secretary Kelly, we have been trying to ask questions about policies and problems like these to your Department, and there have been times it's been very difficult to get answers. I'm willing to do a reset and check that off as you not having all hands on deck. Going forward I hope that, together, the Chairman and I can work to make sure we have witnesses from the Department of Homeland Security answer some of the questions that need to be answered. And frankly, I think that works for the benefit of your department. Because, if you're not here explaining, then assumptions can be made that can be unfair. So going forward, I

hope that we can have a new beginning as it relates to not only getting questions answered but also with having witnesses at hearings.

I'm glad you're here today. There are a lot of important issues before us, and I have a lot of questions. I hope we can count on you and your Department being willing to answer them going forward. Thank you very much.