

U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
“The Department of Homeland Security Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Request”

June 6, 2017

Ranking Member Claire McCaskill

Opening Statement

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Secretary Kelly, thank you for being here today and thank you for your service to our nation.

You appeared before our Committee two months ago, for the first time in your capacity as Secretary of one of the largest and most complex departments in the federal government. Since that time there have been a number of developments that show just how important your job is, not just because of the size of your department, but because of your role in protecting our nation from the threats we face every day.

On May 11, you met with airline industry executives about potentially banning large electronic devices in aircraft cabins on flights from Europe as well as the Middle East, given concerns about potential “laptop bombs” that might get past screeners.

On May 12, a “ransomware” cyberattack struck more than 200,000 computers in over 150 countries, shutting down auto production in France, affecting police departments in India, and closing doctors’ offices in Britain.

And tragically, on May 22, a suicide bomber killed 22 innocent concertgoers in Manchester, England and then on June 3, terrorists killed seven in London.

These are just a few examples of why we are counting on your vigilance, and the vigilance of the men and women of your department. We rely on you to identify threats, prevent attacks, and keep America safe. These examples also speak to the importance of ensuring that we provide the Department of Homeland Security with the resources that it needs to prepare for and prevent these threats.

The importance of your work also speaks to the critical responsibility that this Committee has in providing oversight. I have never—ever—found any government agency that worked better with less oversight. Asking hard questions is the only way to do that—and as I’m sure you know, I’m not afraid to ask them. And I’m glad you’re not afraid to answer them. As you said last month to this year’s graduating Coast Guard cadets, “Tell the truth to your seniors even though it is uncomfortable, even though they may not want to hear it. They deserve that. Tell the truth.” I sincerely hope that you continue to speak truth to power, and

look forward to your honest assessment of what we can do to help secure our nation.

I want to ask you about your proposed budget. The Administration has proposed a \$44 billion budget for the Department of Homeland Security. That's a nearly 7% increase over the continuing resolution that we passed in December for FY 2017. And while I want you to have all of the tools and resources that you need to do your job well and to protect this nation, I am concerned that this budget lacks a serious consideration of how we can best allocate those resources to do so.

As I mentioned before, we live in a dangerous world and are facing an ever-evolving threat. Mass transit locations and other "soft targets" where large groups of people gather have served as prime targets for terrorist activity. In addition to aviation security, the TSA helps to secure mass transit and passenger rail, freight rail, highways and buses, pipelines, and sea ports. According to the TSA, more than 10 billion passenger trips are taken on mass transit systems each year. We need to make sure we're keeping people safe, no matter how they choose to travel.

I am very concerned that the President's budget plans to cut critical TSA programs at a time that we cannot afford to let up when it comes to security measures. A large portion of this cut is taken from the Visible Intermodal

Prevention and Response (VIPR) Teams. VIPR teams deploy all across the country to provide critical assistance with securing airports, subways and bus terminals. The President's budget aims to cut VIPR teams from thirty-one down to just eight teams to cover the entire country.

Additionally, the President's budget is going to completely eliminate the Law Enforcement Officer Reimbursement Program which provides assistance to local law enforcement agencies who help secure our airports. Hundreds of airports across the country take part in this program, and particularly for the smaller airports, this assistance is critically important to help them meet their security requirements.

The President's budget will also slash other DHS programs that provide critical security to our transportation systems. The Transit Security Grant Program will be cut in half. The Port Security Grant Program will be cut in half. The President is calling for a complete elimination of the Complex Coordinated Terrorist Attacks Grant Program. Secretary Kelly, I'm seriously concerned that these budget cuts will weaken our ability to detect, prevent, and respond to future attacks.

Additionally, I am concerned about some of the things that are not in the budget. We are being asked to fund additional Border Patrol agents and Air and

Marine officers, but there is no provision in this budget for additional CBP officers at the ports of entry. The majority of drugs and other contraband come into this country through ports of entry, and CBP officers are the ones responsible for finding and stopping them. If we are so interested in securing our border, why are we completely neglecting our ports of entry?

And I'm concerned that even though the Administration is asking to spend *more* money on DHS, it's cutting the budget of its watchdog that investigates waste, fraud and abuse. In fact, the IG concluded that this budget will *substantially inhibit* him from performing the duties of his office. I don't know why the President is cutting OIG when his own budget director, Mick Mulvaney, said at his confirmation hearing QUOTE "Congress needs to have those inspectors general doing their job...I do look forward to making that a priority at OMB."

So, Secretary Kelly, I'm glad you're here today. There are a lot of important issues before us, and I have a lot of questions for you. And I hope we can count on the Department being willing to answer them now and in the future.