

Opening Statement of Chairman Thomas R. Carper
“The Homeland Security Department’s Budget Submission for Fiscal Year 2015”
March 13, 2014

As prepared for delivery:

My thanks to Secretary Johnson for joining us today. I am pleased that in recent weeks we have been able to help put in place a team of talented people around Secretary Johnson. In fact, last week we scored a hat trick by confirming individuals to three key positions at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—Susan Spaulding as the Undersecretary of the National Protection and Programs Directorate, John Roth to be the Inspector General, and Gil Kerlikowski as the Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection.

Providing strong and steady leadership is critically important to the Department and the security of our nation. Providing adequate funding for the Department to carry out its mission is also vitally important – and is a central part of our job here in Congress.

The President’s request for \$38 billion dollars in discretionary funding for the Department makes some very tough choices.

It cuts the Department’s discretionary budget by one billion dollars, or almost three percent below 2014 appropriated levels. Many other Departments, including several without national security missions, did not see these kinds of cuts. In fact, some saw increases.

If you factor in the requested—and much deserved—one percent pay raise for federal employees in this budget, DHS will receive about \$100 million less than it did after sequestration slashed its Fiscal Year 2013 appropriation.

As the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently reported, the sequestration cuts had a real, and negative, impact on DHS. For example, operations were scaled back at some components and first responder and preparedness grant funding was reduced, resulting in canceled training and hiring freezes across the country.

While some of the impacts of sequestration were immediately visible, many of the negative effects may not be felt for years to come. Some DHS officials have expressed concern that if funding levels were to be reduced further, the Department’s ability to meet mission priorities may be affected, as well as employee morale. The fact that this budget request for DHS is below the sequestration level of funding is, frankly, concerning.

I am concerned that these reduced funding levels will negatively impact the ability of the Department to effectively carry out its mission.

In recent years, we have had a number of incidents that remind us just how important that mission is— the attempted airline bombing on Christmas Day in 2009, the attempted terrorist attacks in Times Square in 2010, the devastation wrought by Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and the tragedy in Boston less than a year ago.

When you factor in the growing cyber threat, and the threat we face from foreign fighters gaining experience in places like Syria and perhaps traveling here to do us harm, it is easy to understand why this budget request raises both concerns and questions from Congress.

That said, we are facing extremely difficult budgetary times and we must be diligent to ensure taxpayer funds are well spent. I've said it before and I'll certainly say it again, all federal agencies and Departments, including DHS, have to shift from a culture of spendthrift to a culture of thrift so we can assure American taxpayers that their hard earned money is being spent responsibly and effectively.

The Secretary seems to have taken this message to heart, identifying \$200 million in cost-savings in the proposed budget. This is good to see.

It is also good to see that this budget proposes much needed funding for cybersecurity. However, I will be carefully examining this proposal to determine whether the funding requested is sufficient to support the Department's efforts to help companies adopt the cybersecurity framework that was recently released by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

Of course, resources alone are not going to get the job done. That is why passing bipartisan legislation to compliment the President's cybersecurity Executive Order remains one of my highest priorities this year.

I also welcome the Administration's continued commitment to the security of our nation's borders demonstrated in this budget.

The budget maintains the current record level of staffing for the Border Patrol, and makes targeted investments in force-multipliers—technology such as advanced radars, cameras, and ground sensors—that help those agents work more effectively and efficiently. These efforts will build on the tremendous progress we have made in securing the border over the past decade.

The President's budget request includes proposals to help pay for these smart investments in part by raising the fees that Customs and Border Protection charges for inspecting passengers and goods at our airports and seaports. This new revenue would be used to deploy 2,000 new officers at our ports of entry. Let me say that again, 2,000 new officers at our ports of entry. That would be a positive development for both our economic and national security.

The budget also includes a proposal to raise fees to continue efforts to secure our aviation system against potential attacks. I like to say that, if something is worth having, it's worth paying for, and I support these fee increases.

And I'm not the only Member of Congress who supports these types of fee increases to cover the cost of providing critical government services. Republican Congressman and Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan—said this last December, when speaking about authorizing new aviation security fees: "If you use a government service, pay for the government service. If you use airport security, pay for airport security." I couldn't agree more.

If we want more officers expediting travel and trade at our airports, border crossings and seaports, and if we want more secure airplanes—and I think that we do—then we ought to be willing to pay for it, just as Congressman Ryan suggested.

If Congress does not support the requested fee increases, either the Department will have to cut about a billion dollars in funding from a budget that is already stretched thin—or Congress will have to increase the discretionary funding it provides to the Department.

Speaking of smart, strategic investments, I am encouraged to see the increase in funding for the consolidation of the Department's Headquarters at the St. Elizabeths Campus. The funding requested will help move this project along. Completing it is critical to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of operations and management of the Department.

I also welcome the President's request for \$45 million for the modernization of the financial management systems at the Department. This is a key investment to ensure that DHS can sustain its recently obtained clean audit.

With that said, I'm concerned about some of this budget's significant cuts to other key homeland priorities.

For example, I am troubled by the proposed cuts to the homeland security grants that DHS provides to state and local governments. As we saw clearly in the response to the Boston Marathon Bombing and in severe winter storms this year, state and local officials are the ones who will inevitably be on the front lines responding to a terrorist attack or a natural disaster.

While acknowledging that our approach to grant funding distribution must be risk based, I want to ensure that the Department is able to continue to adequately help state and local responders be prepared to respond effectively.