

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
“Resources Needed to Protect and Secure the Homeland”**

**OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GARY C. PETERS**

**May 23, 2019**

**AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Secretary McAleenan, for being here today.

The Department of Homeland Security has a simple mission that is tremendously difficult to execute: safeguarding the American people. As the youngest, yet third-largest executive department, DHS has faced unique challenges since its creation.

Unifying the efforts of over 240,000 hardworking employees across 22 agencies while managing a \$75 billion budget is a staggering task under the best of circumstances; and the Department is clearly not enjoying the best of circumstances.

Dynamic, external pressures are bearing down on the Department.

Unprecedented numbers of migrant families and children are arriving at southern border, increasingly complex cyberattacks are straining our networks, a surge in white supremacist violence is presenting new challenges in safeguarding our communities, and natural disasters fueled by climate change are causing incredible amounts of damage to our infrastructure, homes, and small businesses.

At the same time, internal problems are weakening the Department’s ability to adequately respond.

Staffing shortages and low morale were exacerbated by the recent government shutdown. We have seen difficulties coordinating with other agencies, scattered, inconsistent direction from the White House, and a lack of Senate-confirmed leadership in many top positions.

Today, we are here to work together to confront all of these challenges – external and internal alike – and ensure the Department of Homeland Security is able to keep the American people safe.

Hardworking law enforcement officers, public servants, and volunteers along the southern border are doing their best to manage the arrival of tens of thousands of families every month as they flee violence and extortion.

Tragically, we have now seen the death of six minors taken into custody at our Southern border in less than a year. This is simply unacceptable and we must do better. We must secure our Northern and Southern borders, but there is no one-size-fits-all approach. We need the right mix of staff, technology and infrastructure.

We need a Department that is adaptable, forward leaning, and data-driven – both on our borders and in cyberspace. In recent years, we've seen cyberattacks with severe ramifications for both government and the private sector. We must continue and accelerate efforts to position DHS to effectively combat sophisticated cyber-threats.

We also cannot relent in our effort to fight and prevent terrorism, both foreign and domestic.

Chairman Johnson and I recently requested information on DHS resource prioritization related to the shifting terror threats our nation faces. Americans should feel safe in their churches, mosques, and synagogues knowing that DHS is working to keep them safe from acts of terror spawned by white supremacy, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism.

Border security, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism challenges are all constantly evolving and so are the natural disasters faced by FEMA.

Unfortunately, climate change is fueling increasingly destructive hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and wildfires.

Even as these terrible disasters occur more frequently and with more severity, FEMA personnel are being asked to suspend their disaster response mission to assist with other DHS needs at the southern border.

TSA agents and cybersecurity professionals within DHS are also being asked to volunteer for deployment to the southern border, and while the work ethic of these professionals should be commended, nobody can be in two places at once.

There are difficult decisions ahead and we need to have a robust discussion about the Department's budget needs and how you are balancing these critical priorities.

We must get this right. We owe it to the American people to be careful stewards of taxpayer dollars while ensuring that the Department of Homeland Security is effectively safeguarding our national security.

We also owe it to the hardworking men and women of DHS, who are under immense pressure to do their jobs flawlessly and don't get the recognition they deserve.

Thank you for being here today, Secretary McAleenan.

I look forward to a frank and productive conversation.