

Statement of Vice Admiral David P. Pekoske

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Transportation Security Administration

U. S. Department of Homeland Security

Before the

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

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Good morning Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill and distinguished members of this committee. It is a privilege to appear before you today as the President's nominee to lead the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). I would like to thank President Trump for nominating me for this important national security position and I would like to also thank Secretary Kelly and Deputy Secretary Duke for their support during this process.

My first comments today are in strong support of the men and women of the TSA. Each and every one contributes to the security of our nation's transportation system and works tirelessly to earn the trust and respect of the American people. Their work is critical to the security of our aviation and surface transportation systems and they have, in my opinion, done an outstanding job in protecting us from an ever present and very dynamic threat. It would be my privilege to join them as their Administrator and bring my leadership, skills and experience to the effort of securing our homeland.

TSA could not accomplish its mission were it not for the strong partnerships it has with other federal partners, state and local public safety and law enforcement agencies, the airline industry, the government services industry, airport owners and operators, and international partners. Throughout my professional career I have seen the importance and enormous value of strong partnerships and professional relationships. This is the extended TSA team and it would be my privilege to join them as well in our collective goal of ensuring transportation security in the United States.

I have been fortunate enough to have the strong support of family and friends throughout my life. I thank them for always being there, providing unvarnished advice and encouraging me over the years. If confirmed, I look forward to recognizing the important role that family and friends play in supporting the men and women at TSA.

I had the high honor of serving our country in the United States Coast Guard for most of my adult life. I am forever grateful to my Coast Guard colleagues for their investment in my leadership and professional development. If confirmed, I would join Admiral Jim Loy and Vice Admiral Peter Neffenger

as Coast Guard flag officers who have also served as Administrator. Both of them made significant contributions to the development of TSA and I welcome the opportunity to build on the foundation they and other Administrators have laid since the establishment of TSA by the Aviation and Transportation Security Act.

I have extensive experience in counter-terrorism and security operations and in leading a large operating federal agency. I was at the Coast Guard Commandant's side on 9/11 as his executive assistant when the attacks on our homeland occurred. Like you, I will never forget that day and the days that immediately followed. I was privileged to remain as the Commandant's executive assistant when the TSA and the Department of Homeland Security were established.

My first assignment as a Coast Guard flag officer was as Commander of the First Coast Guard District, with regional responsibility for all Coast Guard operations from Northern New Jersey to Maine. Within weeks of arriving in this position, I served as the lead federal official for maritime security at our first two national political conventions since 9/11, the Democratic National Convention in Boston and the Republican National Convention in New York City. As the District Commander, I had oversight of the Coast Guard's maritime security operations in the ports of New York, New Jersey and Boston. We effectively managed risk and ensured the safe and secure flow of maritime commerce in these two ports.

I served as the Assistant Commandant for Operations at Coast Guard headquarters, establishing service-wide policy for our security operations and regularly participating in discussions with the National Security Council staff and the operations deputies of the other military services. While the head of operations for the Coast Guard, we matured the development of Coast Guard deployable specialized forces that provided advanced counter-terrorism capability in our nation's ports and coastal areas.

I returned to Coast Guard field operations as Commander of the Pacific Area. I was responsible for all Coast Guard operations on the west coast of the United States, Alaska and Hawaii. In addition, I was the operational commander of the Coast Guard's polar icebreaker fleet with operations in the Arctic and Antarctic. Given the vast expanse of the Pacific and our national strategy of increasing emphasis on operations in the Pacific theater, I worked closely with the Coast Guards of Russia, China, South Korea, Japan and Canada. I am a strong supporter of international engagement and international standards setting. Both can contribute substantially to the security of the United States.

As Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard I served as the Vice Service Chief, the Chief Operating Officer and the Coast Guard Acquisition Executive responsible to train, equip and organize a Coast Guard force of over 50,000 people. Both Coast Guard Area Commanders and the most senior headquarters staff (Deputy Commandant for Operations, Deputy Commandant for Mission Support, the Assistant Commandant for Resources, The Judge Advocate General, and the Assistant Commandant for Governmental and Public Affairs) reported directly to me in this position. During this time, the Coast Guard responded to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and I served as Acting Commandant when ADM Thad Allen became the National Incident Commander for Deepwater Horizon. In addition, I was the executive champion for the Coast Guard Innovation Program, one of the most well established

innovation programs in government. Should I be confirmed as TSA Administrator, innovation will be one of my key focus areas. I think it is critical in continuing to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of TSA operations.

Following my Coast Guard service, I joined a very successful mid-market company in the government services industry. We provided counter-terrorism services to components of the Departments of State, Defense and Homeland Security. Our expertise was in counter-improvised explosive devices. My experience in the private sector was very valuable, as I learned how government can be a better consumer of private sector expertise and support. In addition, I joined several interest groups that advocated for military, veterans and national security issues. I have been an instructor at the Naval Postgraduate School for several years, participating in a course on innovation for new flag/general officers and members of the Senior Executive Service. I have also been an adjunct faculty member at American University teaching a graduate course titled "Politics, Policymaking and Public Administration."

My experience in the Coast Guard and in the private sector is directly relevant to the mission of TSA. Today, we face a multitude of threats that are persistent and ever evolving. We know that certain terrorist organization remain focused on commercial aviation and disrupting the freedoms we enjoy as an open society. Staying ahead of these threats and ensuring the appropriate measures are in place will continue to be TSA's most significant challenge.

TSA is the face of the federal government to millions of travelers every day. These travelers rightfully expect effective and efficient security with minimum delay by government officials who treat them with respect. I will work diligently with the entire TSA workforce to ensure we meet this standard. We must balance the demands of security with the imperatives of liberty guaranteed in our Constitution.

If confirmed, it would be my honor to serve in of one of the most challenging jobs in government. My overarching goal would be to leave the TSA in an ever stronger position as an effective and efficient provider of security for our transportation systems, especially aviation, with a strong and growing level of public confidence in the agency's mission performance.

I am always reminded of a quote of Alexander Hamilton when he, as our first Secretary of the Treasury, issued instructions to the Commanding Officers of Revenue Cutters (predecessors to the Coast Guard) in 1791. He said, in part, "They will always keep in mind that their countrymen are freemen, and, as such are impatient of everything that bears the least mark of a domineering spirit. They will, therefore, refrain, with the most guarded circumspection, from whatever has the semblance of haughtiness, rudeness, or insult." I think this sage guidance from one our country's founding fathers applies to all federal officials involved in law enforcement and security operations today. It is something that will guide me if I am so fortunate as to have the opportunity to lead TSA.

In closing, I thank President Trump and Secretary Kelly for their confidence in my ability to lead TSA. Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill and distinguished members of this committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and look forward to answering your questions.