

Statement by Senator McCain

Nomination of General John F. Kelly, USMC (Ret.), to be Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

January 10, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaskill, members of the committee, it's an honor say a few words in support of General John Kelly's nomination to be the next Secretary of Homeland Security. He is an excellent choice, superbly well-qualified for the position, and a person of the highest integrity. The American people are fortunate that a man of his caliber is again willing to serve them in an important office after having already devoted many decades of his life to the distinguished service of our country.

When he retired from his last command, Commander of the U. S. Southern Command, General Kelley was the longest serving Marine Corps general still on active duty, having worn the uniform for almost half a century. He was the longest serving active duty general in Marine Corps history, I believe. In fact, I think he was the second longest serving general officer in the entire armed forces. Only the late General John Vessey, also an officer of the highest integrity and selfless devotion to duty, served longer, forty-six years to General Kelly's forty-five.

When he was nearing the end of his tour as SouthComm commander and approaching retirement, he said in an interview that his "greatest fear was that I'd be offered another job."

Mr. Chairman, I have no doubt whatsoever that General Kelly's statement was entirely sincere. Those of us who have had the privilege of knowing General Kelly for a while, who have heard him testify before our committees, and paid attention to his answers to our questions, know that John Kelly says what he believes to be the truth, always, no matter the inconvenience it might cause him. Speaking truth to power is something he's renown for, and no less so for his respect for the chain of command.

Former Defense Secretary Gates had this to say about General Kelly:

"In the event of a military operation or initiative, if he thought the constraints were too great or that it was ill conceived, he wasn't afraid to

speaking his mind to civilian superiors. Always respectfully. And always prepared to move on whatever the decision."

If anyone has earned a peaceful retirement from public duty, it is General Kelly. But he's a patriot ... always. And like Jack Vessey, his peer in length of active duty service, he doesn't refuse his country's call. President Reagan called General Vessey out of retirement to serve as his special emissary to Vietnam to get an accounting for America's missing from the war. President-elect Trump has asked General Kelly to lead the Department of Homeland Security and help keep the American people safe from those who wish us harm. It's work he's obviously well-qualified for.

He served three tours in Iraq, and was a key figure in helping sustain the Anbar Awakening that, with the surge, turned around a war we were near to losing. In that role, he learned the value of developing local relationships based on mutual respect. A lesson that served him well in future commands.

As SouthComm commander, General Kelly was highly regarded for the skill and success he had developing close working relationships with the civilian and military leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean. Many of those leaders consider him a friend. They all respect him.

Even more important for his pending assignment, General Kelly's has extensive experience with many of the challenges that await him as Homeland Security Secretary – the threats to our security posed by drugs and violence that make their way into our country across our southern border, and the potential for developing strains of Islamic extremism in the hemisphere to foment terrorist attacks here. He's the right man to meet these and the many other challenges awaiting him.

General Kelly isn't, I'm sorry to say, a graduate of the United States Naval Academy. It might surprise the committee that I don't find that lack of credential disqualifying. I barely graduated from the place myself. But he has more impressive credentials. He enlisted in the Marine Corps.

General Kelly came from modest beginnings, as do most enlisted men and women in all our armed services. He is the proud son of his working-class family and the great City of Boston. In conversations with me, he's recalled the childhood friends he's lost to the scourge of drug abuse.

Before he went to college, he volunteered to risk his life and limb in an infantry company in the 2nd Marine Division. He was a sergeant when he left the Corps and a second lieutenant when he returned to it four years later. What followed was an exemplary career, with many challenging assignments, and quite a few very dangerous ones, to which he gave every measure of his talent, discipline, courage and love of country.

General Kelly has sacrificed a great deal for his country. More than most. And in every day of his service, he knew and respected and remains in awe of the courage and dedication of the men and women, enlisted and officers, who stand in harm's way so that the rest of us can pursue our aspirations and live our peaceful lives without fear of the terrors they face for our sake.

Should he be confirmed, as he deserves to be and I'm confident he will be, he will be entitled to the appellation, "The Honorable." Few cabinet secretaries will have deserved it more. I endorse his nomination wholeheartedly, with gratitude for his willingness to serve and for the honor of introducing him to you today.

Thank you.