

Statement of Ms. Kirstjen Nielsen
Before the
U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Committee
On Her Nomination to Serve as
Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
November 8, 2017

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaskill, and distinguished Members of the Committee: it is an honor to appear before you today as you consider my nomination to lead the Department of Homeland Security. I am humbled and grateful to the President for the trust he has placed in me to lead DHS during such a critical time.

I also want to thank Senators Rubio and Portman for their kind words and introductions. Thank you to former Secretaries Ridge and Chertoff for their statements- it was an honor to serve and work with you and I look forward to your continued leadership and stewardship of our homeland security enterprise. Finally, I want to thank former Secretary, now Chief of Staff, General Kelly for his leadership, example and 46 years of steadfast service to our nation.

Please allow me to take a moment to introduce the members of my family who are here with me today. My dad, James, my brother, Fletcher, my sister, Ashley, my aunt and uncle, Mary Ellen and Trevor Burton and my cousin Andrew Bragg. I was raised to believe in our country and its founding principles and ideals; to serve our country; and to appreciate and be thankful every day for the freedoms we hold dear as Americans. I am beyond grateful for the values they have instilled in me and their unwavering love and support throughout my life. Thank you for your continued encouragement and for traveling so far to be here.

If confirmed as the sixth Secretary of Homeland Security, it will be the greatest honor of my life to again work with and support the remarkable men and women of the Department of Homeland Security who put it all

on the line every day to secure the Homeland. I can't say enough about the incredible work of the people of DHS many of whom put their lives on the line daily to ensure the safety and security of our nation.

Over more than two decades, I have dedicated my career to working on homeland security issues. In both the public (legislative and executive branches) and private sectors, I have utilized my knowledge of homeland security policy, strategy, and operations, as well as my expertise in risk and resilience, cybersecurity, critical infrastructure protection, and emergency management to help make our nation more secure.

After working on transportation, defense, and government affairs issues and legislation for Senator Connie Mack, I practiced corporate transactional law during which time I learned how private sector company operations are directly affected by organizational structures and delineation of roles and responsibilities. My service in the executive branch began in 2002 at the Transportation Security Administration. At that time, TSA was still part of the Department of Transportation and the formation of DHS was being contemplated. It was an honor to work alongside the countless public servants who stood up TSA and tackled the tough security challenges we faced after the attacks on September 11th and who later helped to stand up the Department of Homeland Security.

I was subsequently commissioned by President Bush to serve as a Special Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Senior Director for Prevention, Preparedness, and Response. Charged with interagency policy development and coordination, I led the development of new national strategies and policies, articulating the roles of all levels of government and the private sector in protecting our nation's critical infrastructure and in strengthening our information sharing. During this time the Nation experienced the devastation of the Gulf Coast that resulted from Hurricane Katrina. Based on the lessons identified from the response to Hurricane Katrina, I led the update and revisions to our

disaster response plans to strengthen our efforts moving into the future. I worked with Congress to draft the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, and co-authored the White House Katrina lessons learned report. As we've seen again during this year's devastating hurricane season, DHS plays a crucial role in disaster preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery working closely with public and private sector partners. I have worked closely with all facets of our emergency preparedness community, and should I be confirmed, look forward to helping to ensure our nation's resilience to natural disasters, terrorist attacks and other major emergencies.

While each aspect of the Department's mission is important, I believe one of the most significant for our nation's future is cybersecurity and the overall security and resilience of our nation's critical infrastructure. The scope and pace of cyberattacks against our federal networks and the control systems that run our critical infrastructure are continually increasing, with attacks growing evermore complex and each more sophisticated than the last. Cyber criminals and nation states are continually looking for ways to exploit our hyperconnectivity and reliance on IT systems. My cybersecurity experience in both the public sector, having chaired the first White House Policy Coordination Committee on cybersecurity, and the private sector, advising government and non-government officials on the development and execution of strategies to mitigate risks and enhance the resilience of our critical infrastructure has prepared me well for the multi-faceted challenge that is increasing our resilience to cyberattacks. I look forward to working with experts at the Department, and within the interagency and the private sector to thwart threats, protect our networks and essential functions and secure our nation's interests in cyberspace.

At the start of the current administration, I also had the honor of serving as Chief of Staff at DHS under then-Secretary Kelly. During that time, I worked closely with state and local officials, cabinet secretaries, foreign partners, and members of Congress on *all* of the issues that DHS faces. I had the opportunity to develop strong working relationships with current

DHS leadership, and helped to develop many of the Department's current key priorities and strategies.

Our nation is facing a complex threat landscape that is constantly evolving. The threats we face are too many and too varied for any one entity to address them successfully alone. I understand the risks and the resulting challenges the Department is tasked with resolving and I am eager to get to work with all of DHS' partners – domestic and international from all sectors- to find solutions. From my experience at TSA in the early 2000s, to my time in the private sector supporting the homeland security enterprise, I have gained a vast understanding of the Department, its components, and the many challenges it faces.

If confirmed I pledge to continue the record of exceptional leadership that General Kelly and Acting Secretary Duke have established at DHS. I vow to the men and women of DHS, to you, and to the hundreds of millions of Americans who rely on DHS every day, to work tirelessly to effectively execute each mission at the Department of Homeland Security. I will work every day to enforce our laws; secure our borders, coasts, and waterways; and protect Americans from dangerous criminals, terrorists, cyberattacks, and the other threats facing our homeland. I also pledge to work every day to give the dedicated men and women of the Department the support, tools and resources they need, and deserve, to carry out their difficult- and often dangerous- missions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. Should I be confirmed, I look forward to partnering with the Committee and the full Congress to protect and secure our homeland.

I look forward to answering the Committee's questions.