



## COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

#### *A Review of the Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security*

May 22, 2019

Today, the Committee is meeting to examine the President's fiscal year 2020 budget request for the Department of Homeland Security. This hearing was originally scheduled for earlier this month with then-Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, who resigned before the hearing was held. We are joined this morning by Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan. The Acting Secretary is being asked to defend a budget request that is, in a word, indefensible. President Trump's budget prioritizes construction of a border wall at the expense of critical homeland security priorities, such as first responder and homeland security grants, cybersecurity programs to defend against foreign spying, and initiatives to secure our transportation systems from terrorist attack.

The Acting Secretary's prepared testimony states "doing more with less is an unacceptable method for achieving mission goals." Yet that is exactly what the President's budget request would force key parts of the Department to do. The President would squander \$8.6 billion in taxpayer money on a wall that will do nothing to address the current situation on the border. I suspect the Acting Secretary knows that, even if he cannot say it for fear of being the next Department official to be dismissed by the White House. And make no mistake, it will be the American people picking up the tab for the wall, not Mexico as the President promised. Congress is preparing to provide additional funding to address the humanitarian crisis on the border, but we cannot allow the President to compromise the rest of the Department, or our Nation's homeland security, in the meantime. Unfortunately, rather than engaging with Congress to address the humanitarian crisis and implement sound border policy, the White House only continues to make matters worse. The President fired Department officials who tried to offer a voice of reason, cut off aid to Central America intended to help address the root causes of migration, and is sending essential DHS personnel to the border, potentially undermining the Department's other critical missions.

Frankly, between the vacancies at the Department and the reports of infighting coming out of the White House, it is difficult to know who is calling the shots when it comes to the border. The President? The Acting Secretary? Stephen Miller? Meanwhile, the number of people in CBP's custody continues to rise. We also continue to see shocking photos of families being held in inhumane conditions and children sleeping on the bare ground covered by nothing more than foil blankets. And, tragically, just this week yet another child died in the Department's custody. But what can we expect from an Administration that separated at least 5,000 children from their parents at the border? To the extent this Administration has a border policy, it has been an abject failure. It is past time to implement a strategy of common-sense solutions to address the humanitarian crisis at the border while ensuring security and upholding our values.

First, we need to ensure humanitarian conditions for people in custody, and particularly vulnerable populations like children and pregnant women. The surge in families at our borders does not excuse inhumane treatment or relieve us of an obligation to treat people with basic human decency. As I mentioned, Congress is engaging with the Administration to provide supplemental funding. Second, we need more immigration judges and asylum officers to increase capacity to handle asylum claims and address the longstanding immigration court backlog. Third, we need to expand proven, cost-effective alternatives to detention to ensure people show up for their court dates as scheduled while their cases proceed. Finally, we need to help address the root causes prompting people to come north by restoring aid to Central American countries acting as partners in addressing this crisis.

We can protect our borders and our homeland while also protecting our American values. The President and the White House have not proven up to that task, but I hope the Acting Secretary will partner with Congress in that effort. In closing, I want to thank the over 240,000 men and women of the Department of Homeland Security for the work they do to secure our Nation every day. From the Coast Guard personnel patrolling our coasts and waterways to the Customs and Border Protection officers at our land borders to the Transportation Security Officers I see as I fly to and from Jackson, Mississippi every week – and everywhere in between – we appreciate the work you do.

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