

HSGAC Hearing:

*Consideration of the Nomination of the Honorable Kristi Noem
to be Secretary, Department of Homeland Security*

January 17, 2025

Opening Statement, as delivered

The Department of Homeland Security, with 260,000 employees and nearly 20 distinct components, epitomizes, in many ways, unchecked power. Its vast responsibilities—from border security and disaster response to counterterrorism and cybersecurity—demand rigorous scrutiny to ensure that they are executed within the bounds of the Constitution and with respect to the freedoms of the American people.

Nearly two years ago, when I became the Ranking Member of this Committee, my team sought to understand the extent of this bureaucratic labyrinth. We asked DHS for a comprehensive list of collaborative entities it participates in—task forces, advisory boards, coalitions, commissions, and the like.

Their response was astonishingly opaque, they stated, “There is not a single comprehensive list to address all the collaborative relationships that the Department and its components engage in.”

In other words: We do so much stuff and we're so big, we can't describe it for you.

But if we can't describe what we have, we got a problem.

In plain language: the DHS had really no idea. Think about it. An agency commanding over \$110 billion annually can't account for its own activities.

This is not just bureaucratic incompetence—it's emblematic of a deeper issue. An agency unsure of its own boundaries and commitments. How can an agency fulfill its mission or earn the American people's trust if it doesn't

even know the extent of its own operations?

But the problems don't stop there. Instead of focusing on critical threats, like securing the southwest border, DHS has shifted its gaze inward, targeting law-abiding Americans.

DHS, under the Biden administration, has often used its vast powers to target Americans exercising their constitutional rights. It's become an agency more focused on policing speech, monitoring social media, and labeling political dissent as "domestic terrorism" than

addressing genuine security threats. While cartels traffic people and fentanyl across an unguarded border, DHS has spent its time and resources creating partisan “disinformation boards” spying on Americans through invasive surveillance technologies.

This mission drift is dangerous. Every dollar spent monitoring law-abiding citizens is a dollar not spent securing the homeland. Every moment spent targeting political opponents is a moment not spent addressing real threats like border security, cyberattacks, or the rising influence of adversarial nation-states. The priorities of DHS have

been deeply distorted, and the American people are paying the price.

And what about DHS's response to COVID-19, arguably one of the greatest threats to homeland security? The answer is clear: nothing. They knew nothing of the origins; they didn't study the issue; and they had no information about gain-of-function research.

We've seen first-hand how unchecked government overreach leads to waste, fraud, and abuse. We cannot let DHS to become yet another agency that operates behind a veil of secrecy. The

American people deserve transparency, accountability, and leadership that puts national security and liberty hand in hand—not at odds with each other.

Today, we gather to consider the nomination of Governor Kristi Noem to serve as Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. I hope this hearing will set the tone for this Committee's work in the new Congress to restore transparency and accountability to an Executive Branch that has grown unchecked.

Governor Noem, if confirmed, you will lead an agency that has lost its

way. Your record as Governor of South Dakota and a former Member of Congress demonstrates your willingness to make difficult decisions, in the face of significant political pressure, and to put the interests of the American people first.

You have the opportunity today to address how your background and vision will translate to leading one of the most critical, and scrutinized, departments in the federal government.

This is the first of many consequential moments for this Committee as we renew our

commitment to the constitutional oversight role that Congress must assert. I have no doubt that the nominee we will consider in the coming weeks and months that you will be up for the challenge.

Governor Noem, thank you for your willingness to serve. And I yield to the Ranking Member for his opening remarks.