

Opening Statement of Senator Heidi Heitkamp (in Ranking Member role)

Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs

Nominations of Claire M. Grady to be Under Secretary for Management, U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Henry Kerner to be Special Counsel, Office of Special Counsel

Wednesday, June 28, 2017

As Prepared:

Thank you Chairman Johnson.

I know Ranking Member McCaskill wishes she was able to be here today, and I know she appreciates the nominees' work with hers and Chairman Johnson staffs throughout this process.

I am honored that Ranking Member McCaskill asked me to step in for her this morning, and I am looking forward to hearing from both nominees regarding how they can best serve the American people through their roles in the Office of Special Counsel and the Department of Homeland Security, if confirmed.

At the heart of OSC's mission is the protection of federal employees from prohibited personnel practices, and specifically, from illegal retaliation against whistleblowers.

As the Ranking Member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee with oversight over the federal workforce, I cannot emphasize enough what a crucial time it is to make sure that our federal workers know that they have a safe and independent agency to turn to in the OSC.

In 2016 alone, the OSC received over 6,000 new matters—a 53 percent increase from 2010. That is a tremendous upturn, and it speaks not only to the large number of prohibited personnel practice complaints in general, but also to the trust federal employees had in Special Counsel Lerner during her tenure at the OSC.

At a time when our federal workforce is undergoing a number of new challenges such as reorganization at the behest of the Office of Management and Budget, it is important that the Special Counsel remains an independent, just, fair, and unbiased

voice when it comes to protecting federal employees when they report any wrongdoing from within their respective agencies.

The DHS Under Secretary for Management plays a critical role in achieving excellence in all areas of DHS mission support. While DHS has made considerable progress in recent years to unify its component agencies, major management challenges remain in the four key areas of human capital, acquisitions, financial management, and IT.

Failure to address these challenges could have serious consequences for U.S. national and economic security, and that is why it is critical to have a qualified individual at the helm.

Specifically, we need someone with demonstrated leadership and experience, a robust understanding of DHS and its various components, a willingness to engage with various stakeholders, and an ability to find opportunities to improve the way DHS functions.

We appreciate the nominees' time today, and I am looking forward to hearing Ms. Grady's and Mr. Kerner's responses to the Committee members' questions.

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