

Opening Statement of Sen. McCaskill
February 28, 2018

DHS Authorization Bill:

Thank you Chairman Johnson. As the Chairman noted, today we were supposed to be voting on the DHS Authorization Act. This will be the first time that this Committee has taken up a bill authorizing DHS on a large scale since the Department was created in 2002. I'm glad that we are pushing this back a week because I think we're really close, and this is too important for the Department to rush through.

The nature of the threat has evolved, and the Department of Homeland Security must evolve with it. This bill is a great opportunity to help DHS move forward. It is also a chance for the committee to set a precedent of reviewing the Department's programs and authorities on a more regular basis.

That said, I'm very disappointed that some of the amendments that were offered are poison pills that will effectively kill the bill even if it gets through this committee. I know the Chairman was hoping to avoid this, and we negotiated in good faith and worked really hard to get the bill to a place where it really improved DHS without getting into some of the more contentious issues. DHS needs some of the authorities in this bill to be more effective in combating cybercrimes and in its acquisition process.

That's why I asked Members on my side to refrain from offering poison pill amendments that would have sunk this bill. That was a big ask, too, because we just had a really tough debate 2 weeks ago that ended in bitter disappointment for many of us and left Dreamers exposed to deportation. But we didn't offer those amendments because we understood that this bill is important for DHS and we'd like to see it get across the finish line. I'm disappointed that not all of the members of this committee could see that as well.

I hope we can take the next week to work through some of the issues with some of these amendments and reach agreements that will result in a bill that still stands a chance of moving through the Senate.

IC IG Nominee Michael Atkinson:

Because we did not hold a hearing on the nominee to be the the Inspector General of the Intelligence Community (ICIG), I would like to take the opportunity to speak briefly about Mr. Atkinson and the IC IG. The ICIG is a very important position, and I am pleased to be able to vote on a qualified nominee. I believe that Mr. Atkinson has the skills and experience necessary to take over a very troubled office.

I am very concerned about the state of affairs at the ICIG. I wrote to the current Acting Inspector General last October, regarding the fact that he is attending a graduate program at Harvard while he is supposed to be leading the IC IG. I have yet to receive a response.

Meanwhile, there have been public reports that the Acting Inspector General and his deputy are not properly carrying out their management responsibilities, have engaged in retaliation and quashed investigative reports. These allegations have been referred to the Council of the

Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE). I hope to know the outcome of that review before long.

I have fought to expand and strengthen whistleblower protections for employees in the intelligence community, including for contractors – and we have had some success. However, the success of these protections depends on the numerous inspectors general in the intelligence community doing their part, especially at the IC IG, which serves as a final bulwark against retaliation for IC employees. We have serious allegations that the whistleblower program at the IC IG is being dismantled from the inside, and that hardworking and knowledgeable staff are being pushed out. This needs to be looked at seriously and carefully, so we can ensure that all whistleblowers are protected from retaliation.

If Mr. Atkinson is confirmed by the Senate I expect him to go into the ICIG and look at what is happening there with a clear, independent, eye; that he assess each employee individually; that he hold management accountable; and, that he work with CIGIE and the IC IG Forum to address any shortcomings in oversight of the intelligence community and to remedy any failure to protect whistleblowers. I know that Members of this Committee stand ready to support this work.