

United States Senate  
Committee on the Judiciary

May 24, 2017

Statement of Lee Francis Cissna, Nominee for Director, United States Citizenship and  
Immigration Services (USCIS)

Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

It is an honor and a privilege to appear before you today as you consider my nomination to be Director of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services or “USCIS.”

I would like to begin by first thanking you, Chairman Grassley, for your kind introduction. The time I spent detailed to this Committee, working with your office, was some of the most professionally rewarding time of my career. I learned to appreciate the importance as well as challenges of Congressional oversight of the Executive Branch; I witnessed the value and importance of bipartisanship; and, most importantly, I learned how to inspire one’s staff to always perform at their best. I would also like to thank the President, Secretary Kelly, and Deputy Secretary Duke for their confidence in me and in my ability to effectively lead the men and women of USCIS as they carry out the agency’s very important mission.

I’d also like to introduce the members of my family who are here with me today. Sitting behind me are my wife, Tiffany, who I met years ago at the Department of Homeland Security, my 6-year-old daughter, Matilde; and my 3-year-old son, Roberto. Also with me today are my mother and father; my sister, niece, and nephew; and my wife’s parents. Without their love and support, I would not have been able to accept this nomination.

The immigrant experience has always been a fundamental part of my family life, and I would be proud to carry that heritage with me should I be confirmed to be the Director of USCIS. My mother immigrated to this country from Peru more than 50 years ago and eventually became a U.S. citizen. I spoke Spanish at home growing up and I speak Spanish exclusively to my own children today. In fact, this hearing will almost certainly be the most my children have ever heard me speak in English at any one time. Interestingly enough, I found in my spouse the child of an immigrant mother as well. My mother-in-law also immigrated to this country, as a child, from the Middle East, and eventually became a U.S. citizen. My children are thus growing up with one Spanish-speaking grandmother and one Arabic-speaking grandmother. Our family is literally a product of our Nation’s legal immigration system. Should I be confirmed, these experiences will undoubtedly illuminate everything I do as USCIS Director.

My professional background also gives me a unique perspective on the work of the agency I have been nominated to lead. I’ve been a consular officer at the U.S. Department of State, and an immigration lawyer in private practice. I started out my DHS career as an attorney with USCIS. During my years of service at DHS headquarters, I have worked closely with USCIS policy analysts, attorneys, adjudicators, and other staff on an almost daily basis. I know the people at

USCIS well, and they know me. More importantly, I know, understand, and am deeply passionate about the issues with which they wrestle.

If confirmed to be the Director of USCIS, I will strive to ensure that the agency carries out its mission in a fair, lawful, efficient, and expeditious manner. I would also want USCIS to remain second to none amongst DHS components with respect to protecting public safety and national security. I believe USCIS's appropriate role is to always act as the good and faithful steward of the Nation's legal immigration system and the responsibilities with which it has been entrusted by Secretary Kelly, Congress, and, ultimately, the American people.

If confirmed, I will regard today's hearing the first conversation in what I hope would be a long, cordial, and constructive relationship between USCIS under my direction, the members of this Committee, and the Congress generally.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.