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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON Department of
Homeland Security**

Member Day Testimony on Fiscal Year 2027 Department of Homeland Security

Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury (NM-01)

March 26th, 2026

Chairman Mark Amodei, Ranking Member Henry Cuellar, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of the Subcommittee on Homeland Security.

Need for a Path Forward

Today marks the 40th day of the shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security—a shutdown that, as you know, did not have to happen.

Federal workers across the country, including thousands who serve our communities every day, remain unpaid because the President and Congress have failed to negotiate in good faith. Instead of coming to the table to ensure that Transportation Security Administration officers, FEMA personnel, and other critical public servants receive the paychecks they have earned, we are watching political brinkmanship put our national security, disaster response, and communities at risk.

We are seeing the consequences unfold in real time. TSA officers are stretched to the brink, unable to afford to report to work. Emergency response systems are strained. The deployment of ICE agents by the Administration to airports across the country a failure to govern.

For my home state of New Mexico, the Department of Homeland Security is a lifeline. The programs of DHS, particularly at FEMA, are essential to protecting lives, rebuilding communities, and ensuring that we can recover from disasters that are growing more frequent and severe every year.

At the same time, I want to be clear: I cannot support another penny of funding for ICE as it currently stands. The ongoing abuse, overreach, and harm inflicted on our communities demands accountability, reform, and a fundamental shift in how we approach immigration in this country.

I am grateful to see the former Secretary of DHS under investigation—and I want to be clear that we will continue to seek accountability for the deaths and illegal activities that happened under her watch. And, we will be watching the incoming Secretary to ensure this does not happen again.

Necessity of Disaster Funds for New Mexico

My top priority for funding at DHS is for full and robust funding for all emergency and disaster relief programs. In particular, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), is vital in helping our communities prepare and recover from disasters, especially through the Pre-Disaster Mitigation and Disaster Relief Fund (DRF).

Last year in New Mexico and across the country, we witnessed record fires and floods that destroyed communities. This includes in Ruidoso and Lincoln County in my district and in Mora County in northern New Mexico in my colleague Congresswoman Leger-Fernandez's district. These communities have faced devastating fires followed by catastrophic flooding—which have displaced families, destroyed homes, and upended local economies. This also includes several tribal communities, including Mescalero Apache and several Pueblos in New Mexico that have also been hit by severe storms and flooding over the last year.

Emergency assistance to rebuild critical infrastructure and protect these communities is vital. And, that is why robust funding for FEMA is essential. But funding alone is not enough—we must ensure that resources move quickly and efficiently to the communities that need them most. Delays in disaster assistance mean prolonged suffering for families trying to rebuild. Congress must prioritize both the scale and speed of disaster recovery funding and ensure the Administration is held accountable for the timely delivery of these resources—and for that we ask your assistance.

Funding Our Transportation Security Administration Workers

The impacts of this government shutdown on the Transportation Security Administration have been dire, especially following the previous shutdown in the fall. Across the country, TSA officers are facing extreme financial hardship due to missed paychecks after five weeks of the TSA going without funding. Many have been forced to stay home or leave their positions altogether because they simply cannot afford to continue to work without pay. In New Mexico, we have lost at least 6 TSA employees during this shut down alone. Those are families going without money to pay their rent and put food on the table.

This is unacceptable. And, that is why Senate democrats have offered 7 bills to fund TSA, which the GOP has voted down every time, and the President has refused to support. And it is why I cosponsored a bill and a discharge petition here in the house to fund our federal workers at TSA, FEMA, and the Coast Guard last week.

The failure to act has significant consequences for our communities—including staffing shortages, safety risks, and increased vulnerabilities in our aviation system. TSA officers are the frontline of our transportation security infrastructure, and failing to support them puts the public at risk. We must ensure full funding for TSA—not only to maintain our national security but to honor the essential work these public servants perform every single day for our country.

Immigration, Refugee Services, and Humanitarian Protections

I also appear before you today to ask for full and robust funding for the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), as cuts to immigration services have had devastating impacts on families and communities across the country, including in New Mexico. These programs are essential to processing asylum claims, supporting lawful immigration work, and ensuring that our system functions in an orderly and humane way. We

must continue to process cases efficiently and fairly and invest in community-based services that uphold human dignity while ensuring compliance with the law.

I am also here today to call for an end to the cruel, inhumane, and lawless immigration enforcement practices that are terrorizing cities and families across this country. We cannot build an immigration system rooted in mass detention and fear. Violations of the constitution, due process, and civil liberties must end—including warrantless arrests, illegal deportations, and intimidation in our communities and especially sensitive locations—including schools, places of worship, and voting and polling centers.

I urge this Appropriations Subcommittee to include language in the bill prohibiting these illegal practices and well as the cruel and inhumane mass detention policies that have proliferated under this Administration. As you know, this year the “Big Ugly Bill” appropriated \$45 billion to expand detention facilities, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars padding the bottom line of private, for-profit detention centers and mass warehouses, where over 40 individuals have died in detention this year alone, more than any previous year in modern history.

I believe Congress must put an end to private for-profit detention. We must eliminate bed quotas that incentivize mass detention, and we must ensure that all enforcement actions comply with the law and uphold fundamental human rights. I urge this Subcommittee to include appropriations language that:

- Requires strict adherence to legal standards, including judicial warrants
- Protects civil liberties and human rights in all enforcement actions;
- Eliminates detention bed quotas;
- Ends for-profit immigration detention;
- Prohibits warehouse-style mass detention centers;
- Ensures families of detainees are notified when a family member is detained, transferred, or released;
- Safeguards voting and polling locations from intimidation or interference.

Moving Forward as a Nation

This is a moral moment for America.

We are being called to decide who we are and what we stand for as a nation. Will we invest in our communities, support the people who keep us safe, and rebuild in the face of disaster? Will we uphold the rule of law and protect the rights and dignity of every person? Will we embrace the families and communities that make this nation vibrant, diverse, and strong?

Or will we allow division and fear to define our path forward?

I believe in an America that cares for its people, honors its commitments, and leads with humanity. A nation that reflects the beauty of its diversity and the strength of its shared values.

Which is why I urge this Subcommittee—and this Congress—to choose that path.

And, to advance a budget that reflects our values as a nation built by immigrants, Black, Chicano, and Native people—that is as big, beautiful, diverse, and welcoming as the communities that make this great country what it is.

Thank you.