



**Homeland
Security**

Privacy Office, Mail Stop 0655

August 5, 2021

SENT BY ELECTRONIC MAIL TO: foia@americanoversight.org

Mehreen Rasheed
American Oversight

Re: 2021-HQFO-00303

Dear Mr. Rasheed:

This is the electronic final response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), dated December 9, 2020, and received by this office on December 9, 2020. You are seeking all formal letters, memoranda, and orders written or signed by Acting Secretary Chad Wolf from November 15, 2020, through November 18, 2020 and records related to any actions ratified by Acting Secretary Wolf, including his own as well as certain actions taken by former Acting Secretary McAleenan, as described in DHS' November 17, 2020 press release.

A search of the Office of the Executive Secretariat (ESEC) for documents responsive to your request produced a total of 6 pages, portions of which are partially releasable pursuant to Title 5 U.S.C. § 552: (b)(6), FOIA Exemption 6.

FOIA Exemption 6 exempts from disclosure personnel or medical files and similar files the release of which would cause a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. This requires a balancing of the public's right to disclosure against the individual's right to privacy. The privacy interests of the individuals in the records you have requested outweigh any minimal public interest in disclosure of the information. Any private interest you may have in that information does not factor into the aforementioned balancing test.

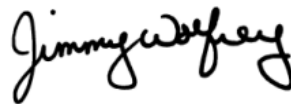
You have a right to appeal the above withholding determination. Should you wish to do so, you must send your appeal and a copy of this letter, within 90 days of the date of this letter, to: Privacy Office, Attn: FOIA Appeals, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, SE, Mail Stop 0655, Washington, D.C. 20528-0655, following the procedures outlined in the DHS FOIA regulations at 6 C.F.R. Part 5 § 5.5(e)(2). Your envelope and letter should be marked "FOIA Appeal." Copies of the FOIA and DHS FOIA regulations are available at www.dhs.gov/foia.

Provisions of FOIA allow DHS to charge for processing fees, up to \$25, unless you seek a waiver of fees. In this instance, because the cost is below the \$25 minimum, there is no charge.

You may contact the DHS FOIA Public Liaison at 202-343-1743 for any further assistance and to discuss any aspect of your request. You may also contact OGIS at the National Archives and Records Administration to inquire about the FOIA mediation services they offer. The contact information for OGIS is as follows: Office of Government Information Services, National Archives and Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Road-OGIS, College Park, Maryland 20740-6001, e-mail at ogis@nara.gov; telephone at 202-741-5770; toll free at 1-877-684-6448; or facsimile at 202-741-5769.

If you need to contact our office again about this matter, please refer to 2021-HQFO-00303. This office can be reached at FOIA@HQ.DHS.GOV or call 202-343-1743 or toll free 1-866-431-0486.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jimmy Wolfrey".

Jimmy Wolfrey
Senior Director, FOIA Operations and Management
(Acting)

Enclosure(s): Responsive Documents, 6 pages

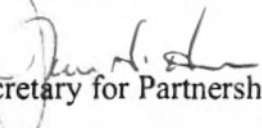


**Homeland
Security**

November 4, 2020

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR Acting Secretary Chad Wolf

FROM: John H. Hill 
 Assistant Secretary for Partnership and Engagement

SUBJECT: **Designation for Executive Director James Kevin Smith as
the Faith-Based Security Advisory Council's Designated
Federal Officer**

Purpose: To seek your approval and signature on Executive Director James Kevin Smith's designation as the Faith-Based Security Advisory Council's Designated Federal Officer.

Background: The Federal Advisory Committee Act (5. U.S.C. Appendix) requires that a federal employee is designated as a Designated Federal Officer (DFO) to oversee the activities of each federal advisory committee. The Faith-Based Security Advisory Council's charter requires that you designate the DFO.

The attached designates James Kevin Smith as the DFO for the Faith-Based Security Advisory Council. Mr. Smith also serves as the Director for the DHS Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives.

Coordination: The DFO designation was coordinated with the Office of General Counsel, and the Committee Management Office.

Timeliness: Upon your signature James Kevin Smith will become the Council's DFO.

Recommendation: Approve the Faith-Based Security Advisory Council DFO designation.

Approve *Chalobang* Disapprove _____
11/16/20
Modify _____ Needs discussion _____

Attachments:

A. Department of Homeland Security Designation

Staff Responsible for Briefing Memo: (b)(6) Faith Initiatives, Office of
Partnership & Engagement (b)(6)

Reviewed and approved by: Chief of Staff, (b)(6) (b)(6)



**Homeland
Security**

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

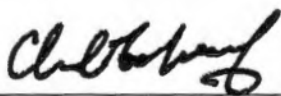
FROM: Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary

SUBJECT: DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICER FAITH-BASED SECURITY
ADVISORY COUNCIL

In accordance with Section 10(e) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) (Public Law 92-463, as amended; 5 U.S.C. App.) and 41 CFR § 102-3.105(i), I hereby designate

JAMES KEVIN SMITH

as the Designated Federal Officer (DFO) for the **FAITH-BASED SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL** for the performance of duties delineated in FACA § 10(f) and 41 CFR § 102-3.120.

Signed: 

Date: 11/16/20

Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary



Homeland
Security

RATIFICATION OF ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE ACTING SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY

I am affirming and ratifying each of my delegable prior actions as Acting Secretary, *see* 5 U.S.C. § 3348(a)(2), (d)(2), out of an abundance of caution because of a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) opinion, *see* B-331650 (Comp. Gen., Aug. 14, 2020), and recent actions filed in federal court alleging that the November 8, 2019, order of succession issued by former Acting Secretary Kevin McAleenan was not valid. *See, e.g., Guedes v. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives*, 920 F.3d 1, (D.C. Cir. 2019) (“We have repeatedly held that a properly appointed official’s ratification of an allegedly improper official’s prior action . . . resolves the claim on the merits by remedy[ing] the defect (if any) from the initial appointment” (quote marks omitted) (second alteration in original)).

When former Acting Secretary McAleenan resigned on November 13, 2019, I began serving as Acting Secretary in accordance with the order of succession former Acting Secretary McAleenan designated on November 8, 2019, under the Homeland Security Act (HSA), 6 U.S.C. § 113(g)(2) (enacted on Dec. 23, 2016, Pub. L. 114–328, div. A, title XIX, § 1903(a), 130 Stat. 2672). That designation of the order of succession followed former Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen’s April 9, 2019, designation of the order of succession, also pursuant to section 113(g)(2), which resulted in Mr. McAleenan serving as Acting Secretary when former Secretary Nielsen resigned.

The Secretary of Homeland Security’s authority to designate the order of succession under section 113(g)(2) is an alternative means to the authority of the Federal Vacancies Reform Act (FVRA) to designate an Acting Secretary of Homeland Security. Section 113(g)(2) provides that it applies “notwithstanding” the FVRA; thus, when there is an operative section 113(g)(2) order of succession, it alone governs which official shall serve as Acting Secretary. Accordingly, I properly began serving as Acting Secretary on November 13, 2019. Because section 113(g)(2) authorizes the designation of an Acting Secretary “notwithstanding chapter 33 of title 5” in its entirety, section 113(g)(2) orders addressing the line of succession for the Secretary of Homeland Security are subject to neither the FVRA provisions governing which officials may serve in an acting position, *see* 5 U.S.C. § 3345, nor FVRA time constraints, *see id.* § 3346.

On September 10, 2020, President Donald J. Trump nominated me to serve as Secretary of Homeland Security. Because I have been serving as the Acting Secretary pursuant to a section 113(g)(2) order of succession, the FVRA’s prohibition on a nominee’s acting service while his or her nomination is pending does not apply, and I remain the Acting Secretary notwithstanding my nomination. *Compare* 6 U.S.C. § 113(a)(1)(A) (cross-referencing the FVRA without the “notwithstanding” caveat), *with id.* § 113(g)(1)–(2) (noting the FVRA

RATIFICATION OF ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE ACTING SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY

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provisions and specifying, in contrast, that section 113(g) provides for acting secretary service “notwithstanding” those provisions); *see also* 5 U.S.C. § 3345(b)(1)(B) (restricting acting officer service under section 3345(a) by an official whose nomination has been submitted to the Senate for permanent service in that position).

That said, there have been recent challenges contending that my service is invalid, resting on the erroneous contentions that the orders of succession issued by former Secretary Nielsen and former Acting Secretary McAleenan were invalid. If those contentions were legally correct—meaning that neither former Secretary Nielsen nor former Acting Secretary McAleenan would have issued a valid section 113(g)(2) order of succession—then the FVRA would apply and Executive Order 13753 (published on December 14, 2016, under the FVRA) would continue to govern the order of succession for the Secretary of Homeland Security.

The FVRA provides an alternative basis for an official to exercise the functions and duties of the Secretary temporarily in an acting capacity. In that alternate scenario, under the authority of the FVRA, 5 U.S.C. § 3345(a)(2), when the President submitted my nomination, Peter Gaynor, the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), would have become eligible to exercise the authority of the Secretary temporarily in an acting capacity. This is because Executive Order 13753 pre-established the President’s succession order for the Department when the FVRA applies,¹ Mr. Gaynor would be the most senior official eligible to serve as the Acting Secretary under that succession order, and my nomination restarted the FVRA’s time limits, 5 U.S.C. § 3346(a)(2).

Out of an abundance of caution and to minimize any disruption to the Department of Homeland Security and to the Administration’s Homeland Security mission, on November 14, 2020, after the President submitted my nomination to the Senate on September 10, 2020, Mr. Gaynor exercised any authority of the position of Acting Secretary that he had to designate an order of succession under 5 U.S.C. § 113(g)(2) (the “Gaynor Order”).² Mr. Gaynor re-issued the order of succession established by former Acting Secretary McAleenan on November 8, 2019, and placed the Under Secretary for Strategy, Policy, and Plans above the FEMA Administrator in the order of succession. Once the Gaynor Order was executed, it superseded any authority Mr. Gaynor may have had under the FVRA and confirmed my authority to continue to serve as the Acting Secretary. Thus, in addition to the authority I possess pursuant to the November 8, 2019, order

¹ Executive Order 13753, Amending the Order of Succession in the Department of Homeland Security, 81 Fed. Reg. 90667 (Dec. 14, 2016).

² Mr. Gaynor signed an initial succession order to this effect on September 10, 2020. Out of caution, due to uncertainties related to the timing of the signing of that order on the date of my nomination to the U.S. Senate, Administrator Gaynor has issued the November 14, 2020, order. Further, I previously issued a ratification order on September 17, 2020, similar to this present order, *see* Ratification, 85 Fed. Reg. 59651 (Sept. 23, 2020), but I am issuing this order today to eliminate any potential question about whether, assuming that the orders issued by Secretary Nielsen and Acting Secretary McAleenan were insufficient to make me Acting Secretary under section 113(g)(2), my ratification has occurred subsequent to the proper signing and issuance of a succession order that has the effect of making me Acting Secretary.

RATIFICATION OF ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE ACTING SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY

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of succession effectuated by former Acting Secretary McAleenan, the Gaynor Order alternatively removes any doubt that I am currently serving as the Acting Secretary.

I have full and complete knowledge of the contents and purpose of any and all actions taken by me since November 13, 2019. Among my prior actions that I am ratifying is a Final Rule I approved and issued in the Federal Register at 85 Fed. Reg. 46,788 (Aug. 3, 2020). Former Acting Secretary McAleenan issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) for that Final Rule at 84 Fed. Reg. 62,280 (Nov. 14, 2019), and I am familiar with that NPRM having previously approved the Final Rule. I believe that all of the aforementioned actions as Acting Secretary since November 13, 2019, were legally authorized and entirely proper. However, to avoid any possible uncertainty and out of an abundance of caution, pursuant to the Secretary of Homeland Security's authorities under, *inter alia*, the Homeland Security Act of 2002, Pub. L. No 207-296, as amended, and 5 U.S.C. §§ 301-302, I hereby affirm and ratify any and all actions involving delegable duties that I have taken from November 13, 2019, through November 14, 2020, the date of the execution of the Gaynor Order, and I hereby affirm and ratify the above noted November 14, 2019 NPRM originally approved by former Acting Secretary McAleenan.



Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary

11/16/2020
Date