News



U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem speaks as prisoners look out from a cell during a tour of the Terrorist Confinement Center in Tecoluca, El Salvador, Wednesday, March 26, 2025. President Donald Trump on March 5, 2026, fired Noem amid mounting criticism over her leadership of the department, including the handling of the administration’s immigration crackdown and disaster response. (OSV News/Reuters/Alex Brandon)

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Washington — March 6, 2026
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Catholic immigration advocates are calling for change at the Department of Homeland Security after President Donald Trump announced March 5 that Kristi Noem is leaving her post. President Trump announced that he had chosen Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla., to replace her as secretary.

Noem's tenure as head of DHS was marked by controversial efforts to enforce the president's hardline immigration policies, some of which have deeply concerned Catholic immigration advocates.

J. Kevin Appleby, senior fellow for policy and communications at the Center for Migration Studies of New York and the former director of migration policy for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told OSV News, "I think we should remember that the policy of mass deportations will inevitably lead to human rights violations, regardless of who leads DHS."

"The real change will come only if the administration — specifically President Trump and his advisors — change course at how they view immigrants and immigration policy as a whole," Appleby said.

Trump's announcement, posted on social media, came as reports circulated in Washington that the president was weighing removing the embattled Noem, and after her performance at congressional hearings the same week reportedly frustrated Trump. Multiple news sources confirmed the president fired Noem from her position.

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In his social media post announcing the change, Trump said Noem "will be moving to be Special Envoy for The Shield of the Americas, our new Security Initiative in the Western Hemisphere we are announcing on Saturday in Doral, Florida."

In the same post, Trump praised her tenure, saying, she "has served us well, and has had numerous and spectacular results (especially on the Border!)."

In a post on X, Noem thanked Trump for the new position, adding, "In this new role, I will be able to build on the partnerships and national security expertise, I forged over the last 13 months as Secretary of Homeland Security."

The announcement makes Noem the first cabinet member to be ousted in Trump's second term.

At a Senate hearing March 3, Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., was among Republican lawmakers who grilled Noem on actions she took as secretary, including a more than $200 million ad campaign.

Noem claimed that the president previously agreed to that campaign, which Kennedy questioned.

"It's just hard for me to believe, knowing the president as I do, that you said, 'Mr. President, here's some ads I've cut, and I'm going to spend $220 million running them' that he would have agreed to that," he said.



U.S. Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla., speaks to the media March 5, 2026, after President Donald Trump picked him to replace Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem. (OSV News/Reuters/Nathan Howard)

Trump later disputed Noem's claim to Reuters, telling that news outlet, "I never knew anything about it."

Noem also faced scrutiny after the deaths of Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, two U.S. 37-year-old citizens and Minneapolis residents shot and killed by federal agents Jan. 7 and 24 respectively, as they protested immigration enforcement actions in that city. Noem declined to retract her previous characterization of Pretti as a domestic terrorist without evidence during her congressional testimony.

Dylan Corbett, executive director of the Hope Border Institute, a group that works to apply the perspective of Catholic social teaching in policy and practice to the U.S.-Mexico border region, told OSV News, "The administration overplayed its hand with the harsh immigration enforcement tactics on display in places like Chicago, Los Angeles and Minneapolis, and now public support for immigration reform and humane policies is growing."

"Although the departure of Secretary Noem is undoubtedly a result of this changing public opinion, as long as the administration remains committed to mass detention and mass deportations, little will change for ordinary communities and immigrant families across the country," he said. "Behind every policy, there is a human life impacted. Until we see a meaningful pivot in the administration’s approach, the deep moral, policy and constitutional challenges on the issue of immigration will undoubtedly continue."

Appleby said, "Public opinion is turning against the administration's deportation policies and I don't think removing the DHS Secretary will change that unless there is a fundamental change in how immigration enforcement is conducted."

"The recent statement from the bishops in border states lays out a roadmap for how immigration enforcement can be implemented in a way that respects human rights," he said.

Trump said Mullin will begin at the end of March. However, the post requires Senate confirmation.