



COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

David Price (D-NC), Chairman, Subcommittee on Homeland Security

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DAVID PRICE *Secure Border Initiative – Its Impact and Evolution* *March 10, 2009 / 10:00 am*

\$3.6 billion dollars. That's what Congress provided in the past three years to the Border Security Fencing, Infrastructure, and Technology (BSFIT) account, targeted at securing about 6,000 miles of land borders as part of the Secure Border Initiative (SBI). SBI, originally intended as a coordinated effort of border enforcement, interior immigration enforcement, and immigration reform, has tilted towards enforcement and physical barriers between the land ports of entry on the Southwest Border. As a result, BSFIT has taken prior border control attempts to new and more expensive levels. Today we will take stock of this program. How is it progressing? Is it working? Are we spending enough or too much?

On one hand, DHS reports it has "effective control" – meaning it can detect and respond to most illegal entry – on over 31 percent of the Southwest Border. That's up from 12 percent in 2005. While apprehensions are lower in most places, it is unclear how much is due to BSFIT investment and staffing as opposed to a weak economy. And the San Diego sector, with the most robust infrastructure and substantial agent presence, actually recorded increased apprehensions last year. Anecdotally, we hear the impact of new infrastructure is not clear, with breaches and evasion of barriers continuing.

Up north is a different story. DHS lacks “effective control” over 99 percent of our 4,000 mile border with Canada. While I am pleased with progress in placing agents on the Northern Border, I remain concerned that BSFIT investment has largely bypassed the North, and I hope to hear today about the status of the Northern Border project that was funded in FY07.

Border Patrol and Field Operations are experiencing historic increases in their numbers, but many are “in the pipeline”, in training, or otherwise not deployed. And a year after the National Guard ended Operation Jump Start, there is a vacuum in operational support that CBP has been unable to fill. Do we have the “boots on the ground” that we all agree are the most important ingredient for border security?

Initially, BSFIT targeted technology to leverage border security. However, its spending does not reflect such emphasis, with over \$2 billion (55% percent) going to pedestrian fencing, vehicle barriers, and roads. At this time about 600 miles of 670 planned for construction has been built or is under construction. The remainder, chiefly in the lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas, is delayed owing to technical, economic, or legal obstacles. I expect to hear from our witnesses today about the cost of the fence and prospects for its completion; the impact it has and will have on operational control of the border; and how the Department is meeting the requirements for consultation and minimizing environmental and community impacts of construction.

SBI technology has taken a more deliberate path. While we have not seen Department plans for the \$100 million provided in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, I look forward to hearing the current plans for testing and deployment of technology solutions intended for the Arizona border, and the plans for the remainder of the year.

To address these issues, we welcome Deputy Commissioner Jayson Ahern, Acting Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, to testify on the Secure Border Initiative and its impact on gaining control over the physical borders of this country. Accompanying him are U.S. Border Patrol Chief David Aguilar and Mr. Mark Borkowski, Executive Director of the Secure Border Initiative.

While any discussion of border security would naturally turn to the instability and increased criminal violence in Northern Mexico, I would ask Members to defer those questions for our second panel devoted to that topic immediately following this panel.

I look forward to your testimony and a thorough discussion of how BSFIT and Border Patrol deployments have improved border security, and the challenges ahead as we strive to find an effective approach to control our borders. Let me turn now to the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Rogers, for his comments.

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