



COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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

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Opening Statement of Chairman David Price
Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Hearing
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This afternoon we are pleased to welcome Secretary Janet Napolitano to her first hearing before this Subcommittee. Since her confirmation on January 20th, Secretary Napolitano has hit the ground running, dealing with issues related to drug-cartel violence along the U.S.-Mexico border; refocusing how the Administration deals with criminal aliens; forging new international partnerships to enhance our efforts to combat terrorism; and taking the lead on the U.S. response to the H1N1 flu public health emergency in the United States and other countries. Madam Secretary, in light of all this, maybe you should thank us for giving you a few hours to catch your breath!

While you have been busy confronting these pressing issues, this Subcommittee has tackled some of the broader questions the Department faces. Unlike previous years, when the budget has dominated our discussions, this year we have concentrated on broader issues touching every component of the Department of Homeland Security—from preparing for a national security event to recovering from natural disasters; from technology acquisitions to improve DHS operations to expeditiously obligating funds for critical grant programs; from immigration enforcement to meeting the basic medical needs of those in the custody of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. By developing this broader perspective, we in Congress are better equipped to help set the Department's budget priorities in a way that best prepares you to face the diversity of challenges to our homeland.

One of the first challenges you have confronted is the surge in violence along the U.S. – Mexican border. The conflict between the Mexican government and drug traffickers has killed thousands, including hundreds of police, military, and public officials. You and a number of your Administration colleagues have visited the border and Mexico; you and others have appeared at multiple Congressional hearings on the topic, including one by this Subcommittee; and all the while this issue has been the subject of intense media attention. On April 15, you announced a Southwest Border initiative to fortify our physical border with Mexico, assist their government in overcoming the brutal criminal cartels, and address related criminal activity within the U.S. involving narcotics, weapons, and human trafficking. Every member of this Subcommittee wants this effort to succeed.

Yet I offer a word of caution: making real progress against criminal activity that has simmered for decades will take more than a surge of activity at DHS and assistance to those on the front lines. It will take a new coordinated approach across our government and society. As part of this, DHS must work in harmony with the Departments of Justice, Interior, Defense, State, and Treasury, all of which have overlapping jurisdictions. You and your fellow Secretaries must consider new strategies to overcome the tradition of stovepiped responses

that focus individual agencies on discrete missions like combating illegal drug suppliers without addressing the demand, or focusing on weapons smuggling without combating human trafficking.

This initiative, by its very nature, will also help address the longstanding problem of illegal immigration. While apprehensions at the border are currently falling, our enforcement-only approach costs the American people billions, and is not a viable long-term solution. In this regard, I am pleased the President has announced his commitment to reform a broken immigration system. I have consistently maintained that without a comprehensive approach to fix the legal means for people to come to our country and to achieve parity between official policy and our labor market needs, investments made along the border and for interior enforcement will never be fully effective at halting illegal immigration.

Therefore, in the absence of comprehensive reform of our immigration policy, we on this Subcommittee must ensure the Department focuses its resources on the nation's highest immigration-related priorities. To that end, since I have served as Chairman, we have provided over \$1.2 billion for DHS to locate aliens convicted of crimes and serving time in prison, and to deport those individuals from the United States after an immigration court has ordered them to leave.

Secretary Napolitano, I am encouraged by your commitment to thwart cross-border violence and find and deport criminal aliens. I also support the Department's recently issued guidelines for ICE investigators to make employer prosecution the focus of its worksite enforcement activities.

These endeavors will need constant and thoughtful attention in their implementation. I would like to hear more about how you will focus DHS resources on these priorities, particularly how you will work within DHS, with other cabinet departments, with state and local agencies, and with Mexico on cross-border problems.

While you are focusing on these issues, DHS is also responding to the outbreak of H1N1 flu. Since the Department of Health and Human Services declared H1N1 flu a public health emergency in the United States, the government has mobilized resources and made preparations in case the outbreak develops into a true pandemic. As the principal federal official for domestic incident management, Madam Secretary, you are charged with coordinating preparation and response throughout the government.

The spread of H1N1 flu is another reminder of the critical need for a robust system to identify and effectively respond to threats of all types, whether manmade or natural. This "all-hazards" mentality is one that I have long advocated for the Department of Homeland Security to adopt in full, and it is a philosophy I believe the President also embraces. As the current outbreak demonstrates, the threats our country faces are diverse and evolving. Consequently, the systems we have in place to prepare for and mitigate these threats must be comprehensive and adaptable, just as the resources we allocate to addressing these threats be based on a holistic understanding of risk to the American people.

Before we get to your statement, I want to address your fiscal year 2010 budget request that we received last week. In total, the discretionary budget requests \$42.7 billion for DHS, or a 6.3 percent increase over the comparable amount appropriated in 2009. I am pleased to note that, in general, the budget does not continue the disingenuous practice of leaving holes where the Administration knows Congress has strong interests, such as state and local grants. In doing so, you have obviously had to make some hard decisions about investments that cannot move forward at this time, such as advanced spectroscopic portal monitors, because of technical problems. You also appear to have taken a more pragmatic approach to solving complex problems, for example by requesting no additional funding for implementation of a biometric exit program under US-VISIT, at least until technical, regulatory and diplomatic issues can be resolved.

Within the total request, I was pleased to see almost \$200 million for identifying and removing criminal aliens through the Secure Communities program, an increase of more than 30 percent over last year's level; an additional \$70 million to take on the criminal organizations operating along the southwest border; an increase of about \$800 million for the Transportation Security Administration to accelerate much needed improvements in baggage screening and enhance surface transportation protection programs; a 26 percent increase in funding for the Department's Science and Technology Directorate to make it harder for terrorists to launch successful attacks with explosives; and over \$100 million more than last year to enhance cybersecurity programs and improve information security in-house. Finally, I am pleased to note that the request includes \$3.9 billion for FEMA to support State and local activities. State and local first responders are our partners in homeland security. When disaster strikes they are first on the ground to respond, and they deserve to have a reliable partner in FEMA.

Yet, the budget request also includes some changes that get my attention. For example, the budget cuts FIRE grants, the basic equipment grants for our firefighters, by 70 percent. Also, when you include transfers, the budget reduces FEMA management and administration by 10 percent, an agency we have been trying to rebuild since Hurricane Katrina. Finally, you propose moving the front line protectors of our federal offices, the Federal Protective Service, out of ICE, an agency with law enforcement experience, to National Protection and Programs Directorate, an agency with plenty to do but no law enforcement mission. We will look at each of these proposals carefully.

Secretary Napolitano, we look forward to hearing from you today. Your full written statement will be entered into the record, so I ask that you limit your oral remarks to a five minute presentation. Before we begin, let me recognize the distinguished Ranking Member of the Full Committee, Mr. Lewis, for any comments he may wish to make.

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