



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Promoting Safe and Efficient Travel and Trade at America's Land Ports of Entry

December 2, 2019

New Mexico Border Authority, Santa Teresa, New Mexico

Today, the Committee has the opportunity to hear about Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) needs at land ports of entry (POE). One such crucial need is additional CBP officers. Earlier this year, this Subcommittee heard testimony about CBP's workforce shortages, and the recruitment and retention challenges faced by the agency. In the intervening months, the Administration has advocated for hiring Border Patrol Agents without seeking the necessary boost in CBP Officers for our POEs. The President's budget request for this fiscal year included \$192 million to hire 750 Border Patrol agents and a mere 171 CBP Officers. Yet, it is the CBP Officers who staff our POEs, where most of the dangerous drugs are smuggled into the United States.

These officers are also responsible for enabling legitimate trade and travel by processing people and cargo that is essential to border communities and our Nation's economy. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the staffing needed to enhance security and increase trade at ports of entry including the ones in New Mexico. In addition to staffing, technology used at our POEs is key to detecting and interdicting contraband while still facilitating the flow of commerce. For example, Non-Intrusive Inspection (NII) systems take an image to "see" inside vehicles and containers to detect drugs, guns, stowaways, or currency without physically opening or unloading them.

I cannot emphasize enough how critical this technology is to combatting drug trafficking without impeding trade. The President only sought \$44 million for NII systems at ports of entry in his Fiscal Year 2019 budget request. Fortunately, Congress provided \$570 million. It is unclear to me how this money is being put to use, however. CBP informed the Committee last month that it plans to use the funds to increase scanning rates at POEs along the southwest border, but it doesn't know how many systems will be deployed, at which ports, or by when.

I am hopeful the Chairwoman's bill requiring an NII implementation plan will get us the information we need to assess future deployments of these valuable systems. Finally, the upkeep and update of infrastructure at ports of entry is key to CBP effectively and efficiently processing and inspecting passengers and cargo. For example, at the Santa Teresa POE, an overweight lane allows for the movement of commercial vehicles, like those transporting wind blades to be used in wind turbines. I understand our witnesses will testify that the lane is not sufficient to efficiently accommodate the size of some of the cargo coming through the port. As such, TPI Composites, the company that produces those wind blades, is negotiating an agreement with CBP to invest its own money in the port to improve the overweight lane.

Unfortunately, the Federal government is not keeping pace with the necessary investments that need to be made at POEs to expand commerce and promote job growth. I look forward to a productive hearing about how limitations in staffing, technology, and infrastructure at our land ports of entry impact trade and security and how we can address those challenges together.

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