



COMMITTEE *ON* HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joint Hearing Statement of Border Security & Enforcement Subcommittee Ranking Member Lou Correa (D-CA)

Exploring the Use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems Across the DHS Enterprise

April 1, 2025

Today we'll hear about how Unmanned Aircraft Systems, specifically drones, are used by the Department of Homeland Security to strengthen disaster response, border security, and the safety of Americans. It is important to hear from our partners in the field, as well as those developing these critical technologies, about what we can do in Congress to support our Federal, state, and local partners. We also need to continue to support research in new and emerging technologies, like drones.

Particularly with the terrible environmental disasters devastating communities across the country in recent years, we must support our front-line partners with the tools needed to do their jobs and keep our communities safe. However, I am concerned to see the administration move to dismantle FEMA, and reduce the resources available for disaster response. Our partners in the field are facing greater challenges in delivering aid to those who need it most.

This hearing is timely as we continue to explore how we can better equip those on the front lines, especially as their resources shrink under the Trump Administration. From the California wildfires to hurricanes and flooding in Florida and North Carolina, environmental disasters regularly create life and death situations.

Drones can help frontline personnel respond quickly and effectively to these situations. For example, drones can help first responders find the quickest route to respond to a disaster and assist with search and rescue operations. As we saw during the terrible fire in Pasadena earlier this year, they can also provide first responders and the public with information in real time.

Once the disaster is contained, they can also help with damage assessments and identifying safe routes. Technologies such as drones not only help with disaster response, but they also keep our communities safe. Drones can enhance public safety by providing real-time situational awareness to law enforcement during active crimes or hazardous material spills. They can also help law enforcement monitor and respond to illegal activities at the border such as drug trafficking.

As we can see, drones have an important role in enhancing public safety. This is why I introduced bipartisan legislation earlier this year – the Directing Resources for Officers Navigating Emergencies (DRONE) Act of 2025, which would allow law enforcement to use federal grants to purchase and operate drones.

In my discussions with law enforcement and emergency responders, it's clear that drones play a big part in saving lives. And will continue to play an ever-growing role in protecting our communities and responding to emergencies. By continuing to unlock their potential, we can save taxpayers millions and

make our streets safer. It's a win-win. But as useful as drones are for law enforcement and first responders, we also need to be prepared for adversaries to use them against us.

As Ranking Member of the Border Security and Enforcement Subcommittee, I've heard that cartels will use drones to carry drugs across the border and surveil the men and women of DHS on the front lines. Last year, the top general for US Northern Command testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that drone incursions along the southern border likely exceed 1,000 a month.

The threats posed by drones at our border increase the need to understand how DHS uses drones and also how they are set up to counter the drones. I hope the Committee will continue its good work on that front in the future. It's also vital that the Federal government collaborate with research centers, the private sector, and venture capital to develop and adopt cost-effective and innovative technologies such as drones and counter drone systems to help confront the challenges we face.

We in Congress must continue to work together to create opportunities for DHS, and our state and local partners to utilize new technologies to effectively respond to disasters, save lives protect national security, facilitate trade and travel, and keep our communities safe.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the recommendations they have regarding drones and counter drone technology which can help secure our border and make our communities safer.

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