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

Smart Investments: Technology's Role in a Multi-Layered Border Security Strategy

July 9, 2024

Today presents an opportunity to hear about innovative technologies that can support and strengthen the Department of Homeland Security's border security effort. I hope we also learn how Congress can do more to ensure our frontline personnel have access to the technology they need when they need it.

I've been pleased to see the Biden administration prioritize integrating advanced technologies like artificial intelligence into homeland security initiatives, while still ensuring the protection of civil rights and civil liberties.

As I am sure we will hear more today, advanced technologies can help CBP officers and agents work more efficiently and effectively to keep the American people safe. At San Ysidro in San Diego alone, over 70,000 vehicles and 20,000 pedestrians enter the U.S. every day. There, our customs officers – the blue uniforms – scan vehicles using AI-powered machines to detect and interdict drugs and other dangerous substances before they enter our communities. These systems not only allow for better targeting, but also for quicker inspections than intrusive manual inspections. Facilitating the timely flow of trade and travel helps keep our economy strong.

Looking nationwide, last year CBP used over 370 non-intrusive inspection scanners to examine 9.2 million conveyances, resulting in the seizure of more than 127,000 pounds of narcotics and the identification of 124 undeclared passengers. The scale of the challenge is clearly immense.

More technology is needed. More scanners mean less fentanyl on the street. More investments in cameras and ground-based sensors means more data that our officers and agents can use to stop human smugglers and human traffickers.

But technology isn't enough. In fact, well-trained personnel are still the Department's greatest resource. Technology helps them do their jobs, but the men and women on our frontlines who staff our ports of entry and work between ports of entry are absolutely critical. And unfortunately, our ports of entry need over 5,000 more CBP officers to do all of the work ask them to do. Border Patrol is also facing a shortfall. Even the best technology cannot fill these gaps.

We should also remember that border security does not start or end at our border. America alone cannot solve our border security challenges. The right technology and personnel can help, but we need cooperation across our hemisphere to tackle the big problems. We need to be working with Mexico to counter drones and go after smugglers and traffickers.

We need to be working with South American countries to screen flights arriving in the hemisphere for individuals, particularly dangerous individuals, who may attempt to cross unlawfully into the United

States. A lot of cooperation is happening already. But we still need more. Our foreign partnerships are vital to securing our border.

In my state, we see the border as more than a national security issue. It's the economic driver for my community and many others. Trade and travel across the border support our economy—the greatest thing we have as a country to compete with other countries. It boosts our economic output and bring us closer with our southern neighbors. As Members of Congress, we support ways to power the growth of legitimate trade and travel while still keeping American communities safe.

We often use technology to do this. But unfortunately, the timely and cost-effective deployment of technologies has been a longstanding issue for CBP. It is vital that the federal government to collaborate with the private sector and venture capital to develop and adopt cost-effective and innovative technologies.

To help address these problems, I worked with Congressman Luttrell to introduce the *Emerging Innovative Border Technologies Act.* This bill addresses capability gaps in border security operations by requiring the Secretary of Homeland Security to submit a plan to Congress to identify, integrate, and deploy innovative technologies like AI, machine learning, and nanotechnology into border security initiatives.

This is just one of likely many things that Congress could do to help our men and women at the border. We must continue to work together to create opportunities for CBP to utilize innovative technologies to protect national security and facilitate trade and travel at the southern border. I look forward to the recommendations from our witnesses.

# # #

Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978