

**Opening Statement, as prepared
Ranking Member Henry Cuellar (D-TX)
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security
Committee on Homeland Security**

**Open Markup Session
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DHS has increased its border security efforts in recent years and we – both Democrats and Republicans in Congress – have supported their efforts. The bills before us today are meant to further support DHS' efforts to enhance border security and make border communities like the one I call home even safer.

That is why I am particularly pleased the Subcommittee is considering my bill, H.R. 915, the Jaime Zapata Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST) Act. H.R. 915 would, for the first time, statutorily authorize the BEST program, a series of multi-agency teams developed as a comprehensive approach to identifying, disrupting, and dismantling criminal organizations posing threats to border security.

The bill is named in memory of ICE Special Agent Jaime Zapata, who was killed in the line of duty in Mexico earlier this year while working as part of a BEST team. I hope the Subcommittee members will join me in furthering the work of the BESTs and honoring the dedication, commitment, and sacrifice of Special Agent Zapata by supporting H.R. 915 today.

I would also like to express my support for your bill, Madam Chairman, H.R. 1299, as well as the bill introduced Rep. Quayle, H.R. 1922. I expect we will have a productive meeting today, as we work to move these bills forward to the Full Committee on a bipartisan basis.

Similarly, I hope in the coming weeks we can work together to advance a DHS Authorization bill through this Subcommittee and ultimately to the floor of the House of Representatives. As we approach the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, this Committee must continue to do its part to help ensure the security of our Nation.