

# **Statement of Ranking Member Henry Cuellar**

## **Field Hearing on**

### **"Using Technology to Facilitate Trade and Enhance Security at Our Ports of Entry"**

#### **Laredo, Texas**

**May 1, 2012**

I am pleased that the Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security is meeting today here in Laredo, Texas to examine ways to facilitate trade and enhance security at our Nation's ports of entry.

I would like to thank my friend, colleague, and fellow Texan, Rep. Michael McCaul, for traveling to my congressional district for this important field hearing.

Earlier today, Rep. McCaul and I visited the World Trade Bridge. We saw the lines of passenger vehicles and trucks waiting to cross into the U.S., viewed existing infrastructure at the bridge, and talked to some of the Customs and Border Protection officers who process travelers and cargo entering the country.

While we only had the opportunity to visit one bridge today, it is important to note that U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Laredo Field Office is made up of eight ports of entry with thirty-two border crossings.

These include passenger and cargo crossings via bridges, airports, railroads, dams, and one seaport and ferry, extending from Brownsville to Del Rio.

The Laredo Field Office processes the largest amount of commercial traffic along the entire U.S.-Mexican border, with more than \$1.6 billion in fees, duties, and tariffs collected in FY2011.

On a typical day, the Laredo Field Office processes 189,589 passengers and pedestrians and 5,611 entries of goods via truck, rail, and commercial aircraft.

Those of us who call Laredo home understand the importance of this cross-border travel and commerce not just to our community or the border region, but to the entire country.

Mexico is the U.S.'s third largest trading partner and second largest export market, with an average of more than \$1 billion dollars in two-way trade between the countries per day.

Our trade with Mexico also sustains six million jobs in the U.S., making it vital to our own economic prosperity.

At the same time, border residents in particular are aware of the challenges we face with respect to expanding infrastructure, adding new technology, and hiring more Customs and Border Protection officers to staff the bridges and facilitate trade and ensure security.

I hope to hear from our first panel of witnesses about what can be done to maximize our limited personnel, technology, and infrastructure resources, particularly in these tight budgetary times.

I also hope to hear about what they and their respective agencies are doing to make the most of their resources and plan for the future.

Cooperation amongst various federal, state, and local agencies and stakeholders will be the key to our success in this effort.

Just before this hearing, we had a meeting with representatives from law enforcement and relevant officials and I am confident in their commitment to working together on these issues.

I hope to hear from our second panel of witnesses about their viewpoints on the current status of cross-border trade and security, and what they believe can be done to move us forward on this important issue.

Success is imperative for our community, our region, and our country.