

**RANKING MEMBER RON BARBER (D-AZ)
OPENING STATEMENT**

Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency

**Hearing on:
“DHS Information Technology: How Effectively Has DHS Harnessed
IT to Secure Our Borders and Uphold Immigration Laws?”**

2:00 p.m., Tuesday, March 19, 2013

Each year, the Department of Homeland Security spends approximately 15% of its total budget on Information Technology, or IT, systems.

In Fiscal Year 2012, that amount totaled approximately \$6 billion.

Given the significance of this investment, it is important that we are holding this hearing today in an effort to conduct oversight over these very costly systems.

While the Government Accountability Office and the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General have found that most of the major IT investments by the Department are sound and providing DHS the necessary tools to carry out its mission, several IT projects are not going as promised.

This is especially true of technologies used to secure the border.

I have seen firsthand the waste of taxpayer dollars on programs like SBInet, that seemed promising, yet ultimately cost over \$1.5 billion, with little to no return on investment.

To my dismay, SBInet’s successor, according to GAO, the Arizona Border Technology Plan, appears to face the same challenges as SBInet and looks like more of the same.

These are two examples that show that the Department must do more to improve its IT structure, governance, and the manner in which it develops and implements IT systems.

Hopefully, recent changes to how IT decisions at the Department are managed and overseen will yield better results, and budgetary savings, especially as it relates to border security.

Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, brave men and women that work for Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, put their lives on the line to secure our borders and prevent illegal trade and travel from crossing-into the United States.

If there are technology-based solutions that can help them fulfill their mission it is essential that the Department and Congress provide them with those resources.

However, we must ensure that the technology we deploy is proven, cost-effective, trustworthy and meets the needs of those on the front lines.

We must ask the end-user is this technology that is needed, and is this technology that would actually work in a border environment.

When developing new IT systems, I encourage the Department to utilize the services of its own Science and Technology Directorate, in addition to leveraging the skills and knowledge that can be found in our Nation's universities.

In 2008, the Department chose the University of Arizona to co-lead a team of research universities that have partnered to form the Center of Excellence for Border Security and Immigration.

This partnership has yielded numerous successful endeavors that can stem the flow of drugs across the Southwest border; aid in detecting deception and malicious intent by those seeking to enter the country; and improve the effectiveness of our checkpoints.

As we seek to improve and harness new border-related IT systems I would encourage the Department to continue to utilize the University of Arizona Center of Excellence and to also engage ranchers and those living and working on the border for ideas, solutions and first-hand accounts of what does and does not work.

I would also encourage the Department to engage Boeing and others who have worked on projects to secure the border to learn what has worked so far, and what has not.

In closing, I would add that while the use of technology to secure our border is needed and a sign of the times, nothing can replace the actual boots on the ground.

Border patrol agents are the first line of defense in securing our Nation. Yet, recent budget cuts have essentially eliminated much-needed overtime that allows agents the ability to effectively fulfill their duties.

Moreover, at this time, every single Border Patrol agent has received notice that he or she may be furloughed – or prevented from working and earning pay – due to the current sequestration.

I want to be clear, the furlough of Border Patrol agents and severe cuts to their overtime hours will place the security of our border and the entire country at risk. This is indefensible.

As we evaluate technology on the border, which comes at a high financial cost, I would caution us to ensure that the Department is not exceeding IT cost estimates at the risk of putting border patrol agents out of work.