

Statement of Ranking Member Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

Hearing on “Measuring Outcomes to Understand the State of Border Security.”

March 20, 2013

I am pleased the Subcommittee is meeting to examine the Department of Homeland Security’s efforts to use metrics to quantify border security. This discussion is particularly timely.

As Congress continues to work on legislation to reform our immigration system, border security will be integral to the discussion. In recent years, Congress has made unprecedented investments in border security personnel, technology, and resources, to help DHS achieve that goal.

Existing border metrics, while perhaps imperfect, indicate these investments have paid off. Apprehensions of border-crossers totaled nearly 365,000 nationwide in FY 2012, which is a 78 percent decrease from their peak in FY 2000.

A December 2012 Government Accountability Office report requested by Ranking Member Thompson and Rep. Ron Barber provides additional insight into border security metrics collected by CBP largely for its internal use.

According to the report, Border Patrol data shows that the effectiveness rate for eight of the nine Border Patrol sectors on the southwest border improved from fiscal years 2006 through 2011. GAO also found that the recidivism rate across the dropped to 36 percent in fiscal year 2011, down from about 42 percent in fiscal year 2008.

It is important for Congress to have an accurate assessment of remaining needs at our borders so we can identify areas for improvement, but I am encouraged by these trends. While metrics are useful to measure our continued progress toward better managed borders, I will reiterate my strong opposition to tying comprehensive immigration reform to achieving some arbitrary standard of border security.

Instead, we must move forward on parallel tracks, reforming our broken immigration system while continuing to work together to achieve more secure borders.

I would also caution that no single number or metric can tell us whether our borders are secure.

The geography and terrain of our borders are very diverse, and the threats can differ from mile to mile based on highways, mountains, waterways, plains, and deserts. Also, metrics that are useful at the ports of entry will differ from those that are meaningful for between the ports of entry.

Instead, I believe DHS should use a range of data points, combined with stakeholder input, to determine the state of the border and make decisions about where additional resources may be necessary.

Today, I hope to hear from the operators – Chief Fisher and Assistant Commissioner McAleenan – about what they believe are the best metrics to assess the state of our borders. I am particularly interested in hearing from CBP about what metrics are most valuable at the ports of entry, which is something we hear less about compared challenges between the ports of entry.

Further, I want to hear how Mr. Borkowski uses information from the operators, both in developing the Border Condition Index and in making border security technology acquisition decisions.

Lastly, and arguably most importantly, I would like to hear from Judge Escobar how border cities’ and communities’ input and needs could be included in these decisions.