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

Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency

Hearing: "Examining Challenges and Wasted Taxpayer Dollars in Modernizing Border Security IT Systems"

Technology, infrastructure, and personnel are three key elements to securing our borders and ensuring the safe and legal entry of people and goods into the United States.

Employees from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) utilize many different types of technology to carry out their mission. One of the largest IT systems currently in use is TECS, which is the primary border enforcement system supporting the screening of travelers entering the United States.

The use of TECS goes well beyond CBP and ICE. TECS is currently accessed by over 20 federal agencies; resulting in over 70,000 users conducting more than 2,000 transactions each and every day. According to CBP, which maintains TECS, it is the largest, most important law enforcement system currently in use by Federal, State and local law enforcement agents.

It supports law enforcement "lookouts," border screening, reporting for CBP's primary and secondary inspection processes, money-laundering tracking and reporting, telephone and data analysis, and intelligence reporting and dissemination.

In sum, TECS is a vital asset to homeland security. However, TECS is a legacy system that has been plagued with problems based on the age of the system and its outdated technology.

As a result, the Department of Homeland Security is in the process of modernizing this 34-year old border security tool, through a multi-billion dollar project known as TECS Mod.

Given the importance of TECS and its widespread use throughout the law enforcement community at every level, I support its modernization and look forward to the day when it can be used with speed, efficiency, and a reduced likelihood of false positives.

Unfortunately, four years after the beginning of TECS Mod, ICE is not much closer to developing a solution than it was on Day 1. Not only that, but CBP is still unable to determine its costs or schedule with sufficient detail.

Furthermore, DHS's management of this project and the lack of stated requirements have led to the waste of millions of scarce homeland security funds.

This concerns me because. As Ranking Member of this subcommittee, it is my responsibility to ensure that the Department is spending tax payer dollars efficiently and that its programs are actually doing what they were intended to do and are keeping Southern Arizonans safe.

Ultimately, the Department of Homeland Security is at risk of spending an additional $45 to $60 million per year to maintain the aging system due to its outdated technology and exorbitant maintenance costs.

CBP, the nation's largest law enforcement entity and its thousands of law enforcement agents across the United States rely on this system. They rely on it in order to do their jobs and keep us safe from harm.

Our Border Patrol agents and Customs officers and other border security officials in the field are doing their part to keep our country secure. We owe it to these front-line personnel to provide them the technological tools they need to carry out their mission.

At present, TECS Mod is being managed under the direction of two separate program offices – one at ICE and the other at CBP.

Although we have been advised that these offices coordinate and the initial decision may have made sense "on paper," I am concerned that this decision will result in duplication, unnecessary costs and uneven results, which will ultimately affect the end user.

When you put two separate Components in charge of the same program, it is difficult to determine who should be held accountable for its results.

This could lead to jurisdiction conflict or worse, the inability to track accountability.

According to GAO, the schedule and cost for both programs are unclear, making it more difficult for those who rely on TECS to do their jobs. CBP states that the project will be complete in 2015, but GAO doubts that is possible.

ICE cannot determine a date because it has halted all work on TECS until an independent contractor can determine the life cycle costs and the necessary requirements. As a result, the 2015 is in doubt.

In sum, the Department has work to do to turn this effort around and put it on the right track. I look forward to hearing from both CBP and ICE on how they plan to move TECS Mod forward, including how they will define key requirements, identify and manage risks, and accurately estimate a completion date for full modernization.