

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

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

“Authorizing Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement”

April 8, 2014

I would like to thank Chairman Miller for holding today’s hearing to discuss authorizing U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Enacting such legislation is long overdue. Authorizing legislation for these agencies has not been updated since the Homeland Security Act of 2002 established CBP and ICE within the Department of Homeland Security. Therefore, neither component is authorized in law in its current form. While the law has not been updated, the world has continued to turn.

Today, CBP is one of the largest components within DHS, with 60,000 dedicated employees committed to securing and administering our Nation’s borders. The agency has a myriad of new responsibilities, including administering more sophisticated traveler screening programs, expanded trusted traveler initiatives, and enhanced border security technologies.

ICE is DHS’s investigative agency, with over 20,000 men and women enforcing Federal laws governing border control, customs, trade, and immigration. Their work is also ever more complex, with investigations related to narcotics smuggling and human trafficking in addition to immigration enforcement and other responsibilities.

Given the scope and importance of the missions carried out by CBP and ICE, proper authorizing legislation is essential to ensuring appropriate staffing and programmatic guidance from Congress. It is the responsibility of this Committee to ensure such legislation is acted upon.

That is why I am proud to be an original cosponsor of both H.R. 3846, the United States Customs and Border Protection Authorization Act, and H.R. 4279, the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement Authorization Act.

I thank the gentlelady from Michigan for the bipartisan nature of the discussions regarding these bills to date and look forward to continued collaboration on the measures as they move through the legislative process. The bills, as introduced, will provide an excellent basis for discussion today and a good starting point for the legislative process. I look forward to continuing to work together as we move toward a possible markup.

Today, I look forward to hearing from Members about what provisions they believe need to be included in legislation authorizing CBP and ICE. We are fortunate to have Members on the Democratic side with a great deal of expertise on border security matters, whether they represent a border district or have a long history of work with this Subcommittee.

I hope they will be actively engaged in laying the groundwork for a possible future markup by questioning the witnesses on issues relevant to the legislation being considered today. Members’ insight will be invaluable as the legislative process moves forward.

I understand that the Administration has not yet taken an official position on either H.R. 3846 or H.R. 4279. However, I hope the witnesses will do their utmost to offer their insight, opinion, and expertise in response to Members’ questions regarding the bills as introduced.