

RANKING MEMBER RON BARBER (D-AZ) OPENING STATEMENT

Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency

Hearing on: “*The Executive Proclamation: Designating the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks a National Monument: Implications for Border Security*”

Thursday, July 10, 2014

I want to commend the hard working men and women of the U.S. Border Patrol who work every day to protect our nation by securing our border.

Our Border Patrol agents in Southern Arizona and across this country work in harsh terrain and in dangerous and difficult conditions. I am thankful for all that they do to keep us and our communities safe.

Today’s hearing is an opportunity for us to discuss the relationship between national monument designations that include land on and near the border and border security.

On May 21, 2014, the president designated the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks as a national monument. This proclamation includes nearly 500,000 acres of federal land in New Mexico.

It is important that we preserve our nation’s lands in a responsible manner and are good stewards of our natural resource and lands considered to be both culturally and historically significant.

Arizona has a proud legacy of protecting and conserving our natural resources for current and future generations. It is both vital to our local economy and our environment.

It is also absolutely critical that we protect our borders.

The district I represent makes up 83 miles of the border with Mexico. It is my job to ensure that the people who live and work along the border feel safe and secure in their homes and on their land.

Compared to other sectors, the Tucson sector has reported an apprehension rate of 28 percent and a 49 percent drug seizure rate. These are some of the highest levels in the entire country. The system as it stands is obviously not working.

When I go to the border and talk to ranchers, farmers, business owners and other people living and working on the border, I hear the very real concerns they have about feeling safe in secure in their homes.

We must do more to secure our borders, including develop specific metrics for measuring border security, provide our Border Patrol agents with a reliable pay system, and ensure our agents have the resources they need to effectively do their jobs.

I look forward to hearing from today’s witnesses about the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument.