

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

Hearing “Port of Entry Infrastructure: How Does the Federal Government Prioritize Investments?”

**Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security
July 16, 2014**

I thank Chairman Miller for holding today's hearing examining how the Federal government prioritizes investments in port of entry infrastructure.

As a Member from a border state, I understand how important appropriate infrastructure and staffing at our ports of entry are to not just border communities, but our Nation as a whole.

On an average day, about \$2 billion in trade crosses our land borders, creating jobs and bolstering the economy in cities and towns across America.

In fact, trade just with Mexico supports six million jobs in the United States.

Meanwhile, our ports of entry are aging and their infrastructure can no longer accommodate the volume of trucks, vehicles, and pedestrians that cross every day, resulting in increasing wait times.

These decades-old facilities were not built to accommodate post-9/11 security technology either.

CBP previously estimated it would need \$6 billion over 10 years to modernize existing ports of entry to meet its current security and facilitation missions.

Congress failed to provide funding in fiscal years 2011, 2012, and 2013 for port of entry infrastructure, exacerbating the backlog of infrastructure projects.

Meanwhile, staffing shortages continue to be a problem, as CBP remains several thousand officers shy of what its staffing model indicated is necessary to properly staff our Nation's ports of entry.

As a result, wait times at many ports of entry continue to grow, costing the U.S. economy – and American consumers – billions.

I asked the Mayor of El Paso, Texas, Oscar Leeser, to join us today to speak about what his community is doing, in partnership with CBP, to reduce wait times and make improvements at the three ports of entry in his city.

His Member of Congress, my colleague from Texas, Rep. Beto O'Rourke, is a leader on this Committee on border issues, and we are pleased to have a representative from his community share firsthand experience about what we must do to properly resource and staff ports of entry.

I hope to hear from Mayor Leeser about his thought on ways we can work cooperatively to provide the infrastructure and staffing communities like his need.

I also look forward to hearing from our Federal witnesses about how port of entry infrastructure needs are prioritized and what we can do to maximize our limited border security dollars in this area.