

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Border Security Gadgets, Gizmos, and Information:
Using Technology to Increase Situational Awareness and Operational Control***

May 24, 2016 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border and Maritime Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Border Security Gadgets, Gizmos, and Information: Using Technology to Increase Situational Awareness and Operational Control”:

“This Committee has conducted vigorous oversight of DHS’s attempts to deploy security technology along our Nation’s borders over the years – and with good reason. Beginning with the Integrated Surveillance Intelligence System (ISIS), later the America’s Shield Initiative (ASI), and more recently Project 28 and SBlnet, DHS has consistently over-promised and under-delivered border security technology.

For example, at the time then-Secretary Janet Napolitano canceled SBlnet, the program had been deployed to only 53 miles of border in Arizona at a cost of about \$1 BILLION. This Committee has been fortunate to have the Government Accountability Office (GAO) engaged on each of these procurements, contributing significantly to our oversight efforts.

With respect to its ongoing program, the Arizona Border Security Technology Plan, two years ago GAO reported that CBP was not following best practices for scheduling, verifying cost estimates with independent sources, testing technology to determine effectiveness and suitability, or establishing performance metrics for the technology. In short, GAO’s initial work showed that the program suffers from some of the same deficiencies that ultimately led the Department to cancel the SBlnet program.

In March of this year, GAO reported on CBP’s Integrated Fixed Tower (IFT) acquisition, a key component of the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan. Announced in March 2012, the IFTs – 53 fixed surveillance tower units equipped with ground surveillance radar, infrared cameras, and communications systems – were intended to address the capability gap left when SBlnet was canceled.

Unfortunately, DHS was forced to re-baseline the IFT program in December 2015, about three years after CBP determined the program could not meet its initial schedule goals. The program’s full operational capability date has so far slipped from September 2015 to September 2020, and acquisition costs have increased by \$53 million. Those of us who participated in SBlnet oversight had hoped CBP learned its lessons from that program and would be applying them to this newer effort in Arizona.

I hope to hear from CBP and GAO today about the reasons for the cost, schedule, and performance changes for the IFTs. Similarly, I want to have a frank discussion about CBP’s other major border security technology acquisitions and assets, including Mobile Surveillance Capabilities (MSCs), aerostats, and Predator Bs. I continue to support using technology as a force-multiplier along our Nation’s borders.

However, if there is anything our oversight of DHS’s efforts have shown, border security technology must be procured, deployed, and utilized in an appropriate, cost-effective manner. Otherwise, CBP could be left with yet another border security technology system that fails to deliver as promised.”

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