

## **Opening Statement of Ranking Member Filemon Vela (D-TX)**

### **Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security**

#### **“A Dangerous and Sophisticated Adversary: Are the New Border Security Task Forces the Right Approach?”**

**April 4, 2017**

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Those of us who represent congressional districts on the U.S.-Mexico border know firsthand the essential role several agencies within the Department of Homeland Security play in securing America's borders and facilitating legitimate trade and travel.

Integrating the operations of the 22 different agencies that came together as DHS has been a challenge since the Department commenced operations in 2003.

Nowhere is this truer than for border security.

Using the Department of Defense as a guide, former Secretary Jeh Johnson established the border security Joint Task Forces to help ensure Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Coast Guard work together to coordinate operations, maximize resources, and reduce unnecessary duplication of efforts.

We know drug trafficking organizations adapt quickly to any real or perceived weakness in our security, shifting to new locations along the land border, using the ports of entry to smuggle their contraband across the border, or exploiting the maritime routes into this country.

That is why it is so imperative that all of DHS works together to identify, disrupt, and dismantle the networks as quickly as they are adapt to our operations.

Each of these agencies must work together and with their Federal, state, and local counterparts if we hope to combat the cartels effectively.

With that in mind, I hope to hear from our DHS witnesses today about how the Joint Task Forces are operating currently, potential next steps, and the vision for the future.

I also hope to hear from our Government Accountability Office (GAO) witness about what prior DHS coordination efforts tell us about the likelihood for success with the Joint Task Forces.

Ultimately, I believe a whole of government approach that includes border security, cooperation with foreign partners, and domestic demand reduction will be necessary to addressing the threat that illegal drugs and those who traffic them pose to our country.

Getting DHS's role right will be essential to that important effort. I thank the witnesses for joining us today and look forward to a productive discussion.