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### **Chairman Carper's Statement Border Security: Frontline Perspectives on Progress and Remaining Challenges**

WASHINGTON – *Today, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Carper (D-Del.) convened the hearing “Border Security: Frontline Perspectives on Progress and Remaining Challenges”. For more information on the hearing or to watch a webcast of the hearing, please click [here](#). Chairman Carper’s opening statement, as prepared for delivery, follows:*

“Good morning everyone. This is the second in a series of hearings that our Committee is holding to review the progress that has been made in securing our borders and to identify what challenges remain to be addressed.

“In the last two months, I had the great privilege of visiting with some of our frontline border security personnel along both the southern and northern borders. I have seen first-hand the dedication, enthusiasm, and expertise of the men and women who put their lives on the line each and every day to keep our nation’s borders secure. Today, we have invited their bosses to testify.

“During my trip to Arizona in February, I saw a border that is more secure than it has ever been by any of the measures that we have available to us at the moment. In addition, I spoke with local mayors and law enforcement officials who told me that crime rates in their communities were at their lowest rates in decades, and were continuing to decline.

“I saw parts of the border that had experienced high levels of undocumented immigration as recently as 2006, when the Border Patrol agents I met with told me they used to arrest more than a thousand people every single day. Today, those agents told me that they have a busy day if they arrest 50 people. That is a remarkable development – and clearly a significant change for the better. It is also consistent with the dramatic reductions that we have seen nationwide in arrests of people trying to cross our border illegally, which have reached their lowest levels since the early 1970s.

“I also saw the advanced surveillance technologies such as cameras and radars that we are deploying to serve as force-multipliers. The men and women I spoke with told me that these technologies help them quickly pinpoint where people are trying to cross the border illegally so that agents can be sent in time to make an arrest.

“I heard about a remarkable new radar being tested on a drone, called the VADER, that is providing the Border Patrol with an unprecedented view of the people coming across the border. Another new radar system being tested allows agents to detect physical changes to the ground, such as footsteps, to identify where illegal traffic is heading.

“And while some of these technologies are expensive, I saw an inexpensive and versatile airplane called the C-206, that is easy to fly and maintain and can be used to provide an efficient surveillance platform for agents on the ground. I also heard about inexpensive blimps that can be deployed to help agents detect illegal activity.

“What I have seen gives me great hope that we have made tangible, measurable gains in securing our nation’s borders over the past decade and have a good sense of what we need to do to build on that progress. We have to rely on intelligence, and advanced technology, to identify when and where threats are crossing our borders and empower the frontline officers on the ground.

“Despite the gains we’ve made, we still face significant challenges. First is the fact that arrests cannot be the only metric available to measure the performance of our efforts at the border. Without knowing how many people are actually trying to cross the border, we will never know how effective our efforts to date truly are.

“Our witnesses at the committee’s first border security hearing, while noting the significant progress that has been made over the years in securing our borders, also pointed out that the Department of Homeland Security keeps a variety of internal statistics on illegal activity at and between the ports of entry that it does not make public. I don’t think that this is acceptable.

“It is critical that the Department of Homeland Security do a better job of educating the public—and Congress—on how it measures its effectiveness at the border. And it must include estimates for the number of people trying to cross the border without proper documentation.

“Another one of the challenges that most concerns me is the growing sophistication of the smuggling networks operating along our borders – particularly with regard to drugs.

“The drug cartels are using tunnels, ultralight aircraft, and submarines to avoid detection along our borders. They place spotters on top of our mountains to help them avoid law enforcement. And there are troubling links between organized crime in Mexico and terrorist groups overseas.

“In order to meet these new challenges, and to continue to improve our security efforts, we have to evolve our approach to securing our borders. We have to become smarter in how we deploy our limited resources, and focus on deploying those force multipliers I saw in Arizona.

“In addition, it’s important to note that, while most of the security debate has focused on the issues *between* our ports of entry, much of the illegal traffic comes through our actual ports. Since 9/11, we have made tremendous improvements in how people who are attempting to enter the country are screened.

“Today, all travelers must present a secure ID at the border. They are automatically screened against all of our government’s law enforcement, immigration, and terrorism databases in order to ensure that dangerous people are not allowed to enter.

“But we continue to be faced with significant infrastructure challenges. After falling off after 9/11, travel and trade have been ramping up recently. International arrivals to the U.S. have been increasing by 6 percent a year over the past several years—but staffing at our air, land, and sea ports has not kept up. Our ports of entry need to be modernized, and staffed appropriately, to keep pace with these increases in travel

and trade that we are seeing—and that we should be encouraging. We also need to make our ports of entry work more efficiently, so we can focus our inspections on potential threats rather than legitimate travelers. This includes expanding trusted traveler programs, creating public-private partnerships, and working with the public to better identify wrongdoers. It could also include modernizing our fees so that they are fully paying for the costs of inspecting travelers and goods.

“Lastly, as organized crime continues to evolve and become more sophisticated, we need our criminal investigators to do the same. We must continue to focus our efforts on working in integrated, multi-agency teams, such as the Border Enforcement Security Taskforces. These taskforces allow investigators to collaborate across agency lines, sharing information about known and suspected smugglers in order to generate intelligence about their operations that can be used to attack criminal networks.

“There is no doubt that we have more work left to do. But I believe that any honest assessment of where things stand today will conclude that we have made tremendous gains in securing our borders over the past decade. As the Senate begins to consider comprehensive immigration reform this month, I believe that the conversation will be different from the one we had in 2006. In 2006, the perception that the border was out of control was grounded in historically high rates of illegal immigration.

“Today, illegal immigration is at historic lows. As I have seen firsthand in Arizona and Detroit this year and in California two years ago, the unprecedented taxpayer-funded investments that we have made to secure our borders have worked.

“In fact, yesterday I met with the former Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection, Alan Bersin. He told me that, in his view, the increase in border security has been one of the greatest bipartisan accomplishments over the past 25 years, because it has spanned three administrations and had strong support from members, and Presidents, from both parties. I couldn’t agree more.

“I support the efforts to modernize our immigration laws to make the U.S. more competitive and more secure in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. And I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure that any additional investments made to continue to secure our borders is targeted to the kinds of force multipliers that have been proven to be effective, and that represent a good investment.”

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