

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
“Securing the Southwest Border: Perspectives from Beyond the Beltway”
March 17, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Good morning and welcome.

Today’s hearing is the first, of many, dedicated to securing our borders. In the next two weeks, the committee will hold four border hearings designed to begin outlining and defining the problems we face on the southwest border.

Securing our border is incredibly complex. The U.S.-Mexico border stretches 2,000 miles across four states and nine border sectors — each with its own unique terrain and distinct challenges. For example, the Texas Rio Grande Valley (RGV) sector border is in the middle of the Rio Grande, a narrow, often shallow, and easily navigable river. Meanwhile, in Arizona, two north-south mountain ranges provide cover for smugglers and illegal crossers. Protected lands and a Native American reservation restrict access to approximately 80 percent of the Arizona border.

Both push and pull factors drive illegal immigration, and an unsecure border not only contributes to our broken immigration system but also threatens Americans’ national security and public safety. Any border security legislation must recognize that this is a multifaceted problem.

And this problem is exacerbated by our lack of information. We don’t know for sure how many people today are “living in the shadows.” And, most important, there is no solid way to track illegal flow at our borders. How many people today entered this country lawfully but overstayed their visas? How many people crossed the U.S.-Mexico border undetected? Out of those detected, how many were apprehended? Out of those detected and apprehended, how many were let go with a notice to appear? Out of those who received a notice to appear, how many showed up for their court dates? Out of those who showed up for their court dates, how many were actually deported?

Many bills have been passed by Congress to address our border and reform our immigration laws. Did any of them achieve that intended result?

Year	Law	Unauthorized Pop.
1986	Immigration Reform and Control Act	~3,900,000
1990	Immigration Act of 1990	3,500,000
1996	Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act	6,290,652
2001	Patriot Act	9,620,483
2002	Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act	10,258,680
2004	Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act	10,977,950

2006	Secure Fence Act	11,714,296
2007	9/11 Commission Recommendations Act	11,981,292

As chairman, I have stated that border security and enforcement is a priority for this committee. That has not changed. I am not interested in introducing a bill that offers border security in name only. I also have no interest in a bill, no matter how well intended, with unintended consequences that actually make matters worse. All of us in Washington should be required to learn, as student doctors do, to first do no harm.

In order to achieve this, this committee is going to build a very strong record. We will spend the month of March properly defining the problem. Only after fully recognizing the scope of the problem can we begin discussing solutions.

The witnesses here today have traveled from Arizona and Texas to help describe the challenges we face on the southwest border. Thank you for your willingness to share your first-hand experiences. I look forward to your testimony.

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