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Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. I am a businesswoman in McAllen, Texas. The family retail business founded by my father in 1958 – Gilberto's Discount House – was located eight miles from the Rio Grande River and recently closed after 57 years in business. I want to share with you today my experiences on the border, both as a businesswoman and as the chairwoman of the Texas Border Coalition's Committee on Border Security and Immigration. TBC is the collective voice of Texas border mayors, county judges, and communities on issues that affect our quality of life in the Texas-Mexico border region. You'll be hard pressed to find anyone who cares more about the issue of border security than those of us who live, work, and raise our families on the border.

You will hear from others today about community needs, mostly as they relate to the areas of the border between the land ports of entry. Last year, U.S. taxpayers spent \$3.6 billion on Border Patrol for the area between the ports – more than triple the agency's entire budget in 2000. That effort, combined with better interior enforcement and an improving Mexican economy, has contributed to an 80 percent reduction in apprehensions of undocumented border crossers since 2000. I have great admiration for the men and women of the Border Patrol, or as I refer to them as "the men and women in green," and I applaud them and say, "good work."

At the same time, I believe our farmers and ranchers have legitimate complaints that you should strive to address. TBC has consistently opposed the massive federal investment in fencing between the ports of entry, because as army trainers teach, "there is nothing man can build that man can't overcome." This certainly holds true with the border fence -- people are going over it, under it, and around it.

Moreover, using the decline in apprehensions between the land ports of entry as a measure of border security success overlooks the fact that between one-third and one-half of all the undocumented persons in the U.S. today entered this country lawfully through the ports of entry -- and later overstayed their visas. We have to help our

Customs and Border Protection agents (the men and women in blue) do a better job of preventing the entry of people who intend to overstay.

Few would contest that transnational crime on the Mexican border is the principle threat to security on the border. However, measuring border security success based on apprehensions between the ports of entry also ignores the fact that the cartels – the *narco-traficantes* – have built a successful business model based on the smuggling of cocaine, heroin and methamphetamines into the U.S. from Mexico, and the overwhelming majority of that smuggling activity occurs through the ports. CBP officers performing immigration inspections are the primary line of defense against illegal drug flows through the ports of entry.

Narcotics seizures on the border are at all-time high levels, according to the Justice Department. However, the continued success of the \$40 billion illegal drug traffic into the U.S. shows that traffickers are not being deterred by the current effort. I believe if these traffickers were selling a legal product they would be a Fortune 500 company that is well manned, funded, and equipped. The issue is our men and women in blue aren't funded to compete and win this battle. We have to help our Customs and Border Protection agents do a better job of preventing the importation of illegal drugs through our ports of entry by the transnational crime networks.

And as we all know, the 19 Al Qaeda attackers involved in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 entered the United States legally through U.S. air ports of entry – not land ports of entry. They did not swim across the Rio Grande. Overnight, constraining terrorist travel was recognized as a critical defense against terrorist attacks within the United States. The fact that no large-scale attack from foreign terrorists has occurred on U.S. soil since 9/11 indicates that the intelligence and enforcement that has gone into securing the homeland from terrorism has exceeded any of our expectations. In fact, there is not one case of a terrorist attack that involved someone coming across the Mexican border and we would like to keep that way. With that superior record, we have to continue to help our Customs and Border Protection agents prevent terrorist agents from crossing over to U.S. soil.

Proposals to “fix” border security on the Southwestern border often come from people who don't have daily experience on the border, moving legitimate goods between Mexico and the U.S., working with our manufacturers, our farmers, the Customs Inspectors at ports of entry or the Border Patrol agents between them.

I suggest that Congress focus on these two priorities: preventing the unlawful entry of people, especially those who might pose a threat to our nation, through the ports of entry; and preventing the smuggling of high value drugs that are the lifeblood of the transnational criminal networks through the ports of entry.

Increasing effective security measures at the ports of entry will also benefit every state in the union. Increased enforcement – more Customs agents, better technology and functional infrastructure – means more legitimate trade. According to the Wilson Center, 6 million U.S. jobs depend on legitimate trade with Mexico, one in every 24 workers, which amounts to half a trillion dollars of goods and services per year. On a typical day, CBP inspectors process 1 million travelers; handle 70,300 cargo containers; stop 425 agricultural pests from entering the U.S.; quarantine 5,000 harmful products and substances; and identify nearly 600 people who raise national security concerns.

Mexico's trade with the United States rose to \$534.48 billion in 2014, according to a WorldCity analysis of the latest U.S. Census Bureau data. That's a 5.5 percent increase from 2013. Not surprisingly, Texas's largest trading partner is Mexico, with \$22 billion in tech exports flowing to Mexico.

Yet, it can take three or four hours to legally cross the border from Mexico. And that costs the U.S. economy money. My business used to profit from the volume of Mexico residents legally making day trips to shop in McAllen, where the U.S.'s lower tariffs and agricultural subsidies make numerous products 30 percent cheaper to buy here than in Mexico.

In our region, retailers used to have a saying: "when the U.S. has economic problems we would sneeze; when Mexico would devalue the peso we had pneumonia." Unfortunately, because of Washington's way of funding our ports of entry by "putting the cart before the horse" and the perception of criminal activity happening on the American side of the border have caused us to suffer from economic pneumonia all the way around. Our ports of entry suffer from antiquated infrastructure, lack of technology, poor bandwidth, bottlenecks, and an overall lack of preparedness to deal with the increased traffic from Mexican Federal Highway 40 (which begins in Mazatlan, Mexico, crosses the mountains and then goes down to the Texas border). Traffic along this route is predicted to increase 40 percent, making our ports of entry overloaded and inefficient to meet the border trade and security needs of today.

When your customer has to wait three or four hours merely to cross the parking lot without places to use the restroom, that customer is likely to judge even a 30 percent savings as not enough. These are just a few reasons why I chose to shut down my 57-year-old family business. I am not alone.

The result is a significant and chronic loss of jobs and trade on both sides of the border. But long waits at border crossings could be eliminated if the federal government would aggressively invest in our ports of entry with new infrastructure and technology. In business we look at what will give us the biggest bang for the buck, and we believe the biggest return on investment is at the ports of entry. We understand that resources are

limited, but those investments in both security and legitimate trade and travel will give us the biggest return.

Let me give you a real world example. For years, the Texas Border Coalition called on Congress to allow local communities to help pay for additional overtime for Customs and Border Protection Officers. The City of El Paso was one of five pilot projects chosen for a five-year test under Section 560 of the 2013 Consolidated Appropriations Act.

The pilot started a year ago, and traffic volumes increased nearly 20 percent for pedestrians and almost one-third for vehicles. Even with the increased volume, wait times went down as well. We believe that as the program continues, we will see larger decreases in wait times. According to the Pharr International Bridge, which also participates in this pilot program through the South Texas Asset Consortium (STAC), their port of entry recorded \$30 billion in trade in 2014. The City of Pharr tells me that they have found the pilot program very useful and a good return on investment.

A 30 percent increase in vehicular traffic across the bridge means a boost in local business, international trade and benefits every state – all because of an investment by local government. The program is too new for us to be able to quantify the return on investment, but local governments from El Paso to the Rio Grande Valley are sinking their limited funds into these pilot projects because they cannot afford to wait for Congress to honor its constitutional obligations on the border.

This committee has a responsibility to protect the nation from unlawful entry, from transnational crime and from the threat of terrorism. The Texas Border Coalition suggests you can best fulfill your responsibility, best fill the gaps in border security, by investing the same way that local border communities do – in our land ports of entry.