

HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY & GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND BORDER MANAGEMENT

“Improving Security, Trade, and Travel at Land Ports of Entry at the Southwest Border”

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*Via WebEx*

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Chairwoman Sinema, Ranking Member Lankford, and distinguished members of the committee. It is an honor to appear before the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee again, especially the newly structured subcommittee with oversight of Border Management.

The topic of this hearing, Improving Security, Trade, and Travel at Land Ports of Entry on the Southwest Border is a critical one, and it is a privilege to participate with such a knowledgeable panel on Southwest Border operations.

Our ports of entry (POEs), and land ports in particular, have traditionally received less emphasis and focus than they deserve. Our ports of entry with Mexico are an essential gateway for trade and commerce, integrated manufacturing and supply chains, agriculture, produce, and livestock, and daily connections between shared border communities for work, school, and life.

There are also critical security points, where U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers and Agriculture Specialists must identify and interdict dangerous people and goods.

The majority of hard narcotics, the methamphetamine and opioids plaguing so many parts of our country have traditionally been smuggled through these ports of entry. Agriculture pests and diseases that can threaten U.S. producers are encountered daily. Cartels move weapons and hard currency outbound daily as well. And human trafficking, counterfeit products and trade fraud are constant challenges.

Over the past decade, Congress has provided significant resources to CBP for land border ports of entry and enhanced legal authorities to enter into innovative public private partnerships, and CBP has endeavored to deploy them to continually improve the facilitation of lawful trade and travel while enhancing the security.

As a result, CBP has made substantial progress in improving operations at ports of entry, toward the goal of an increasingly well-managed border – one that efficiently and effectively identifies and interdicts threats while expediting the vast majority of lawful travel and trade.

More investment, in infrastructure, technology, and personnel, is needed, however, to sustain and build on this progress—and that investment can have substantial benefits for the U.S. economy, impacting all 50 states.

POEs are important economic engines for U.S. economy. On a typical day, almost \$2 Billion dollars' worth of goods move across our shared border with Mexico. Before COVID travel restrictions several hundred thousand people crossed each day through a few dozen crossing points. Our land border ports of entry require a combination of adequate infrastructure to accommodate the physical flow of pedestrians, personally-owned vehicles, and commercial trucks and trains, as well as innovative technology and highly-trained personnel to operate effectively.

With regard to infrastructure, CBP has worked with GSA across multiple administrations to prioritize critical investments in new and existing ports of entry. And new public private partnerships like the Cross-Border Express and the developing Otay Mesa East and Gordie Howe Bridge projects have also provided new ways to enhance cross-border flow options. But several billion dollars of funding are needed urgently to modernize existing crossings in order to maintain and increase throughput at these ports, many of which have not been improved for decades and are not equipped for modern travel numbers and requirements. This immediate investment needs to be sustained through annual, dedicated funding, along with multi-year funding to prepare for the opening of new crossings and continued growth. This is true infrastructure investment and has national benefits.

With regard to technology, advanced non-intrusive inspection technology now available and being deployed offers the promise of 100% inspection of vehicles and rail cars at our southwest borders. Combined with systems to integrate the data, and platforms to assess the risks presented by these conveyances and their cargo and present actionable feedback to officers and agriculture specialists, the potential for dramatic security improvements is achievable in the coming months and years. Combined with enhanced forensics, investments in intelligence analysis, and investigative partnerships, these technologies provide impressive capabilities and offer significant facilitative benefits as well.

The importance of investments in technology are equaled by the importance of investments in the people of CBP. Ultimately decisions on inadmissibility of people and goods are made by trained professionals. Adequate staffing is essential. The Center for Risk and Economic Analysis at the University of Southern California has found the economic impact to be dramatic. Due to increased efficiency in processing trade and travel, each additional CBP Officer contributes over \$350,000 to the U.S. economy and supports 3.5 jobs. Hiring additional officers pays for itself.

We also need to invest in training and support for these professionals.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that border management is by definition, a binational activity. On the Southwest Border, partnering with Mexico is fundamental. Programs like Unified Cargo Processing, where US and Mexican authorities work together to clear cargo, with

a more fulsome security review and much greater facilitation. Coordinating investments and infrastructure planning regionally is also essential. Building this focus into the diplomatic agenda remains an important objective for improving border management.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today, I look forward to your questions.