

Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper
“Securing the Border: Fencing, Infrastructure, and Technology Force Multipliers”
May 13, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

I want to thank the Chairman for holding this hearing. When we visited south Texas together earlier this year, we heard again and again ‘technology is the key to securing the border.’ I couldn’t agree more. And, I look forward to hearing from our panel today about the technologies and other tools that can serve as ‘force multipliers’ for our agents on the ground. I’m sure my colleagues and our witnesses would agree that we need smart, targeted border security investments.

To me, this means placing a priority on acquiring advanced cameras, sensors, and radars so our agents have real time situational awareness along the border. For example, I have been very impressed with the VADER technology on our drones and the mobile surveillance towers that I have seen along our borders.

It also means working with the Department of Defense to reuse equipment that is no longer needed in theater in places like Afghanistan, such as the aerostats now in use in the Rio Grande Valley. And finally, it means making sure the assets we do have are being used effectively. If we have a plane, helicopter, or drone in the sky, we need to equip those assets with the right cameras and radars so our agents are not flying blind.

Overall, I’d like to learn from our panel today about what technology is working along the border, so we can deploy more of it where it’s needed. I’d also like our witnesses to talk to us about what is not working, so we limit or stop those activities. I know DHS has struggled in the past with some technology deployments, so I hope we can also talk about lessons-learned.

From what I understand, DHS – with the help from our friends at GAO – has already made many improvements to its acquisition policies. I look forward to hearing more about that today, as well. One lesson that I have learned over the years is that ‘you can’t manage what you can’t measure.’ That is why it is vital that DHS continue to develop better metrics to measure its progress in securing the border.

Another lesson from my trips to the Mexican border is that things change. Migration and drug trafficking patterns are constantly shifting in response to our own border security efforts, as well as circumstances in the countries where the migrants and drugs are coming from. That is why I believe our border agencies must be nimble, and why we in Congress must resist setting rigid plans in statute that will soon be outdated.

We also need to listen to the many experts who have told us that border security can’t be won only at the border. We have to take other steps to address some of the factors that bring so many people to our borders. To me, that means passing comprehensive immigration reform and supporting the President’s funding request for Central America.

With that, I look forward to the testimony and thank the witnesses for appearing here today.