

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
“Securing the Southwest Border:
Fencing, Infrastructure and Technology Force Multipliers”
May 13, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Good afternoon and welcome.

Today, we continue our border series hearings with an examination of the Department of Homeland Security’s force multipliers in securing our border: fencing, tactical infrastructure and technology. Through our previous hearings, we have learned that each border sector across the U.S.-Mexico border is different. And the threats from our southwest border significantly differ from our threats on our northern border. These differences in terrain, climate and threats require that we understand each aspect individually and develop a holistic strategy in deploying various resources across our borders.

Not only are our border sectors unique, but illegal traffic constantly flows to our most vulnerable areas. Fencing in populated areas and at our ports of entry has redirected illegal traffic to the most remote areas along the border. There is no better example of this than in San Diego, which was one of our most highly trafficked areas until fencing was built in the mid-1990s and apprehensions decreased by 95 percent. This traffic was redirected to El Paso, Tucson and, today, the Rio Grande Valley sector. Earlier this year, when travelling to RGV, Senators Carper, Sasse and I viewed aerostats that had virtually eliminated illegal traffic in the areas covered by their surveillance, only to have the flow directed elsewhere.

The department has not always been successful in deploying force multipliers. In 2009, after repeated technical problems, costs overruns, scheduled delays, and spending approximately \$1 billion on its Secure Border Initiative-network (SBI*net*), Secretary Napolitano froze funding for the program except for ongoing deployment in Arizona. Today, SBI*net* provides 53 miles of coverage, out of the 387 miles of Mexico-Arizona border. I am interested to hear from the department what lessons were learned from this program and how its latest plan, the Arizona Technology Plan, will avoid these missteps.

Fencing and tactical infrastructure has also been a challenge for the department. For example, we still are approximately 50 miles short of the legally required 700 miles of reinforced fencing along our southwest border. Access roads, lighting, low-water crossings, and bridges are also important resources for Border Patrol agents, as is clearing brush in various sectors. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses how fencing and infrastructure have served as force multipliers across our borders and what further resources are needed to help better secure our borders.

I thank the witnesses for their willingness to answer these important questions, and I look forward to their testimony.