

Chairman Johnson Opening Statement
“Dogs of DHS: How Canine Programs Contribute to Homeland Security”
Thursday, March 3, 2016

As submitted for the record:

Good morning and welcome.

Over the course of my time as chairman of this committee, we have held more than a dozen hearings on border and transportation security, both of which are critical components of national security. Today we will discuss the Department of Homeland Security’s canine programs—a significant, if underappreciated, tool in assisting the department every day in its mission to ensure that America is secure.

The concept of a working dog is familiar to most Americans. Dogs can serve as eyes for the blind and ears for the deaf. They can assist many Americans with mobility restrictions. They serve in the military, detecting IEDs and saving the lives of countless men and women in our armed forces. After disasters, dogs search for survivors and help rescue them.

When we encounter canine units in our airports, at our train stations, or even right here on the Capitol grounds, many of us don’t realize how different they are from the pets that live in our homes. Dogs have long been considered “man’s best friend,” but in the case of the DHS canine teams we have in our hearing room today, they are one of the most powerful, accurate and effective tools available to the department.

A dog’s sense of smell is estimated to be 10,000 times more powerful than our own. To put that in perspective, as one scientist put it, “A dog could detect a teaspoon of sugar in a million gallons of water.”

Earlier this year, I learned that dogs are even capable of smelling cancer in humans at rates that exceed some laboratory tests in use today. Diabetic detection dogs are trained to recognize chemical changes in the human body when blood sugar levels start to get too low or too high. Just as the medical community must consider how to take advantage of dogs’ incredible abilities, the homeland security community should continue to explore additional ways to incorporate such an effective, proven capability into its toolbox.

Researchers and scientists have spent billions of dollars and countless hours attempting to create detection technology capable of matching the sophistication of a dog’s nose. To date, these efforts have failed. As the committee of jurisdiction for the DHS, it is important for our members to be aware of how canine detection units are operating, the costs associated with them, and whether it is worth investing additional taxpayer dollars on the research and development of expensive technology if the best technology is sitting right here in front of us.

I look forward to having a better understanding of how and why working dogs are considered an asset to homeland security and learning more about the science behind their success. I thank all

the witnesses, canine handlers, and canines here today for their willingness to share their stories, and I look forward to your testimony.