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The House Committee on Homeland Security

I want to congratulate the Committee on their work in overseeing the operations of the Department of Homeland Security. The department was created during my tenure as Minority Staff Director of the House Appropriations Committee and I have watched it struggle for more than 8 years now. I must say that I have never witnessed greater chaos in government than in the early years of this department.

There was an extended period in which they could not produce a directory of the names and phone numbers of their key employees. I did a report in 2005 detailing the data from an Office of Personnel Management study which showed that DHS employees ranked the performance of their Department dramatically lower than employees of other federal agencies. During that period we had Departmental IG reports indicating that leaders of the deeply troubled Transportation Security Administration had awarded themselves $1.5 million in year-end bonuses—amounts one third higher than handed out by any other federal agency. TSA also spent $462,000 on an awards ceremony including nearly $2000 for seven sheet cakes.

In 2006, that same IG told ABC News that he had not been reappointed because the Secretary of the Department had labeled him a "traitor and a turn coat" for his effort.

We are finally seeing some improvement but DHS continues to need all of the oversight that the Congress can give it and it needs the support and understanding of Congress in mutual efforts to solve some of its most intractable and enduring problems.

Having said that, I do not see the first issue raised by the General Accountability Office in their February 28 report, the potential for duplicative projects resulting in DHS local grants, as a particularly something that merits a lot of time and attention. We should be mindful of the possibility of duplication and agencies have a responsibility to get sufficient information about projects for which federal funds are being requested to know whether they are likely to duplicate efforts in the same or neighboring jurisdictions.

On the other hand, one would have to expect that local governments, having far greater planning resources to address local needs than the federal government, would also be concerned about using their federal funds wisely and in a way that does not provide two

solutions to the same problem. Frankly, I would be more concerned about local governments using funds requested under the banner of counterterrorism and security as a means of solving other problems not associated with that purpose. Ultimately GAO did not find duplication but simply a lack of optimal reporting.

Federal Facilities Risk Assessment by the Federal Protective Service is different problem and a more troubling one. FPS is currently expected to make these assessments for about 2300 facilities a year. They charge agencies occupying these facilities for the cost of the assessments at a rate that appears to be somewhere between $80,000 and $100,000 per facility. One problem is that at least some agencies seem to lack confidence in FPS to competently perform this work. In addition, there appears to be a problem with FPS being ability to simply execute these assessments at all. Finally, the question has been raised as to whether FPS is charging an unreasonable price for such services.

The committee should get to the bottom of these problems. There are at least two sides to every problem. It would strike me as entirely plausible that FPS simply lacks the expertise and management capabilities to effectively perform this function. It is also plausible that other agencies are unwilling to give up turf to a central provider of services even thought that would be a more logical and less costly approach. It is also plausible that both of those scenarios are accurate. The amount of money involved is not small but the importance of protecting federal facilities is even bigger. The committee should insure that the facilities are protected and at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer. It may take a lot of time and patience but that is what good oversight is all about.

Finally, I noticed that an issue not in the latest GAO report was mentioned in the Chairman's comments about this hearing on the committee website. Those comments involved the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan which is simply the latest iteration of efforts that now date back 15 years and previously known as Secure Border Initiative Network. Over time we have spent close to a billion dollars on these efforts and they have yet to demonstrate anything like the capability we had all hoped for.

It is tempting in a political season to assign blame for such failure. I could point out that this particular contract was crafted in 2005 and signed in 2006. But I don't think that accomplishes much if we want to solve the problem. Good oversight is not about who does the best job of playing "gotcha" but finding out why bureaucracies fail to perform. Is this problem simply lack the managerial competence in DHS to organize a task of this dimension? Is it that smart people were sold on technologies that were still not mature enough to work in the real world? Is poor contract performance to blame? Is this a problem that will simply take a lot of time, money and patience to solve? Is it some portion of all of these?

The answers to these questions are important and this committee can play a vital role in forcing out the truth—but only if it truly seeks the truth and unfortunately that is sometimes not the real objective of oversight investigation.

Again, I congratulate you on holding this hearing and would be happy to answer any questions the subcommittee may choose to ask.