



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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**Statement of Chairman Jeff Duncan (R-SC)
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency
Committee on Homeland Security**

**“DHS Information Technology: How Effectively Has DHS Harnessed IT to Secure Our
Borders and Uphold Immigration Laws?”**

March 19, 2013

Remarks as Prepared

The component agencies that make up the Department of Homeland Security rely heavily on information technology (IT) to perform a wide range of missions. IT is especially important with regard to border security and immigration enforcement. And with one of the federal government’s largest information technology budgets, DHS’s component agencies such as Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) rely on critical IT systems in their daily operations to protect the nation’s borders, prevent terrorists from entering the U.S., and facilitate the legitimate flow of people and trade into and out of our country. Having been down on the border at our ports of entry, I recognize the integral role IT infrastructure plays in the ability of ICE and CBP agents to carry out their mission.

In fiscal year 2012, the Department of Homeland Security planned to spend nearly \$5.6 billion in IT investments, \$1.7 billion of which is for programs the Department considers to be major investments in CBP, ICE and USCIS. A few examples of these mission critical programs related to border security and immigration enforcement include:

- CBP’s Automated Commercial Environment-International Trade Data System, which will replace existing technologies and increase efficiencies by serving as a central data collection system for federal agencies needing access to international trade data in a secure, paper-free, web-environment.

- Similarly, both CBP and ICE are working on their respective portions of the Traveler Enforcement Compliance System – or TECS Modernization program – which will be an important upgrade to a legacy system developed in the 1980s by the U.S. Customs Service to support inspections and investigations.
- A similar effort is ICE’s Detention and Removal Operations modernization, which will significantly upgrade IT capabilities to support the efficient detention and removal of aliens who are in the custody of ICE.

Given the size of the Department’s investments in IT, effective management and oversight of IT programs and expenditures is critical to ensure DHS is using taxpayer money efficiently and holding programs accountable for agreed upon deliverables.

Despite some successes by the Department in data center and network consolidation, as well as cloud-based service offerings and establishing IT Centers of Excellence, GAO and the DHS Inspector General have identified numerous cases where the Department has yet to reduce costs and duplication through technology-based integration and modernization. GAO reported in September 2012 that of DHS’s 68 major IT investments, roughly one-third had not fully met their cost or schedule targets. These delays could mean border agents will have to make do with legacy IT systems for longer.

Similarly, the DHS Office of Inspector General has identified information technology management as a major challenge facing the department including attempts to create a unified information technology infrastructure for effective integration and agency-wide management of information technology assets and programs.

At the component level, the DHS Inspector General identified aging IT infrastructure, interoperability and functionality at CBP as specific challenges, creating an environment difficult to support CBP’s responsibilities to secure the border. For instance, the IG reported that in some instances Border Patrol staff cannot communicate seamlessly from analog to digital platforms with Federal, State, and local partners in all sections of the country. I personally find it alarming that a decade after the Department was stood up and billions of dollars poured into securing our borders and preventing another September 11th that CBP staff in one location might not be able to reliably share information not only with local law enforcement, but even with other agencies within DHS.

Similarly, a November 2011 DHS IG report detailed struggles by USCIS to transform its fragmented, paper-based business processes to a flexible, efficient, and electronic adjudication service. However, this transformation has yet to be fully implemented because of delays in strategy and system requirements, which ended up costing American taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. As a result, USCIS missed an opportunity to process immigration benefits more efficiently, combat identity fraud, and share critical information necessary to quickly identify criminals and possible terrorists.

I am happy to welcome our witnesses to the hearing today and looking forward to hearing about the steps taken by the Department to develop an agile approach to IT development at these critical agencies and progress in eliminating duplication, consolidating existing technologies, and improving the overall management of those IT projects of CBP, ICE and USCIS which will enhance DHS's missions of securing the border while upholding immigration laws.

It is absolutely critical that in a time of financial belt-tightening – particularly as the Congress begins to look at addressing the issue of comprehensive immigration reform – that DHS be able to meet IT investments and capabilities on time and on budget without posing a risk to the Department's ability to fulfill its mission of securing the homeland.

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