

Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency

Hearing on:
***“Assessing DHS 10 Years Later: How Wisely is DHS Spending
Taxpayer Dollars”***

9:00 a.m., Friday, February 15, 2013
311 Cannon House Office Building

RANKING MEMBER RON BARBER OPENING STATEMENT

I am looking forward to working with the Chairman in a productive bipartisan manner as we conduct oversight over the Department of Homeland Security and other homeland security functions.

This is our first Subcommittee hearing in the 113th Congress and I cannot think of a better issue to examine than the manner in which the Department spends taxpayer dollars.

The Department of Homeland Security has one of the largest budgets in the federal government.

Each year approximately 40 billion dollars in appropriated funds flow in and out of the Department.

Among other things, these funds are used to pay over 220,000 employees, secure our aviation system, provide disaster aid to states and local governments and purchase the equipment used by those protecting our borders.

We owe it to the taxpayers to ensure that these funds are appropriately used, fully accounted for, and spent wisely.

Unfortunately, over its ten year history, that has not always been the case at the Department of Homeland Security.

My congressional district in Southern Arizona includes over 80 miles of U.S.-Mexico border and my constituents along the border are particularly affected by criminal activities along the border with nearly 40 percent of all drug seizures and apprehensions occurring in the Tucson Sector.

As their representative and as one of only ten Members of Congress that represent a district that shares a border with Mexico I am committed to improving security along the Southwest border.

Visiting with ranchers, border patrol agents, and local law enforcement agents in my district, I have seen firsthand how the Department uses taxpayer dollars to secure the border and I know we can do more.

In 2006, the Department of Homeland Security announced its plan to install technology along the southwest border that would serve as a virtual fence and provide Border Patrol with the information it needs to secure the border.

Seven years and over one billion dollars later, we are still without the plan that was originally envisioned and its subsequent iteration, the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Program, remains in question.

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) the Department does not have the information necessary to fully support and implement the estimated 1.5 billion dollar plan, which is the successor to the canceled multi-billion dollar SBInet.

In addition to finding that the Department “has not yet demonstrated the effectiveness and suitability of its new approach for deploying surveillance technology in Arizona,” GAO also found that the 1.5 billion dollar ten-year cost estimate for the program may not be reliable.

If this new plan goes awry, the Department will have spent over 2 billion dollars in an attempt to develop border security technology, with little more than cancelled programs and cancelled checks to show for its efforts.

This is but one example of why the Department must fix its broken acquisition system, improve how it develops cost analysis and do a much better job at planning the purchase and deployment of technology.

To its credit, under the new Administration, the Department has made some improvements.

The newly created Office of Program Accountability and Risk Management, which is designed to manage the day-to-day oversight of acquisition programs, appears to be a step in the right direction and I look forward to learning more about this office and its benefits.

I am concerned; however, that this office consists of only 45 staff responsible for over 18 billion dollars worth of acquisitions.

Moreover, according to GAO and the Department’s Office of Inspector General, the Department finally has strategies and procedures in place that should produce better results, but the lack of cohesion and the decentralization that still exists throughout the Department prevents these strategies and procedures from being fully implemented or enforced.

As we approach the Department’s ten year anniversary, I applaud its many successes. However, until its management functions are fully integrated and working properly we cannot be assured that its making the best use of scarce taxpayer dollars and doing all it can to protect Americans who live and work along our borders and across our country.