

Statement of Ranking Member Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

Hearing on “What Does a Secure Border Look Like?”

311 Cannon House Office Building

February 26, 2013

Today, I am pleased the Subcommittee is meeting to examine the way forward on border security.

While I welcome the discussion, I want to caution against the notion that our Nation’s borders can ever be fully and finally secured.

The border is always changing and evolving.

New threats emerge and we, in turn, have to find new ways to respond.

In other words, our efforts to secure our borders will always be a work in progress.

And for that reason, we must not tie comprehensive immigration reform to achieving some arbitrary standard of border security.

Instead, we must move forward on parallel tracks, reforming our broken immigration system while continuing to work together to achieve more secure borders.

Over the last several years, Congress has made unprecedented investments in border security personnel, technology, and resources, to help DHS do just that.

These investments include:

A roughly 50% increase in total appropriations for DHS’s immigration enforcement and border security-related activities, from \$7.89 BILLION in fiscal year 2006 to \$11.65 BILLION in fiscal year 2012.

Nearly doubling the total number of U.S. Border Patrol agents – from 10,819 agents in fiscal year 2004 to 21,394 in fiscal year 2012.

A 20% increase in the total number of CBP officers – from 18,110 in fiscal year 2004 to 21,790 in fiscal year 2012.

More than quadrupling the number of miles of fencing on the southern border, from 139 miles in fiscal year 2006 to 651 miles as of this year.

Deploying hundreds of new fixed and mobile video surveillance systems at our Nation’s borders.

An increase in the number of ground sensors to detect cross-border movements to 13,406 in 2012, up from about 11,200 in 2005.

The establishment of an unmanned aerial system (UAS) border surveillance program. Today, there are 10 UASs patrolling our land and maritime borders. In 2006, there were none.

Unfortunately, I have serious concerns that, unless Congress acts, cuts mandated by the sequester would undermine the progress we have made with these investments.

Under sequestration, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) would have to absorb more than half a BILLION dollars in cuts, rendering the agency unable to maintain current staffing levels of Border Patrol agents and CBP Officers as mandated by Congress.

Specifically, CBP would have to reduce its work hours by the equivalent of over 5,000 Border Patrol agents and over 2,750 CBP Officers.

Staffing reductions would affect the Border Patrol's ability to secure our borders between the land ports of entry and increase wait times for passengers and cargo at land, air, and sea ports across the country.

Similarly, the U.S. Coast Guard would have to curtail air and surface operations by more than 25 percent, reducing essential missions including migrant and drug interdiction and port security operations.

This is absolutely unacceptable.

I hope to hear from our CBP and Coast Guard witnesses today about the effects of the sequester on their ability to carry out their missions their plans for dealing with these draconian cuts.

Finally, as we discuss "what a secure border looks like" today, I urge my colleagues to be mindful that border security means more than just securing the southern border between the ports of entry.

It also means knowing who or what may be attempting to come across the vast open places along our comparatively less monitored *northern* border.

It means stopping a terrorist intending to cross through a port of entry on our northern border to blow up LAX.

It means interdicting Omar Farouk Abdulmutallab *before* he boards a plane headed to Detroit.

It means preventing migrants or narcotics from turning up in vessels along the coast of California.

And it means knowing who and what is entering our ports and waterways, whether the coast of South Florida, the Great Lakes, the Rio Grande, or the Port of Houston.

But I am encouraged by the progress we have made and believe we can do still more.