

Statement of Ranking Member J. Luis Correa

Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency Hearing

“Building for the Future: Examining Challenges Facing the Department of Homeland Security’s Consolidated Headquarters Project”

Thursday, April 12, 2018

I am disappointed not to have the Under Secretary for Management before us today. The Under Secretary for Management oversees the Department’s budget and is responsible for the management and administration of the Department. It would have been useful to hear her vision and plans for the St. Elizabeths project.

At previous hearings on this matter, the Under Secretary’s testimony has shed significant light on the Department’s plans and priorities for the project and how Congress could best support progress.

Much has been said about DHS’s inability to effectively consolidate its offices and components at the St. Elizabeths campus. However, many do not recognize that while Congress authorized the project, it failed to fully fund it.

Let’s start from the beginning of this consolidation project. Are the reasons for consolidation still valid today? Has anything changed from the initial plans? Focused national security will stop the bad guys and protect citizens and our communities.

This project will house major components of the Department to improve its effectiveness and efficiencies such as communication and information sharing and to be more effective in protecting our nation.

In 2013, we were paying \$1.6 billion on dozens of leases throughout the Washington DC, Virginia, and Maryland areas with \$400 million on maintenance and upkeep costs.

These numbers are from 2013, and we don’t know what those numbers are today?

While this project was supposed to be completed by 2016, at this Subcommittee’s last hearing on the DHS headquarters consolidation held in September 2014, we learned that from fiscal years 2006 through 2014, Congress provided \$1.6 billion less than requested. That gap has persisted.

To date, of the \$4.8 billion requested by DHS and General Services Administration (GSA) for the project, only \$2.3 billion has been appropriated.

DHS and the GSA were able to complete the new Coast Guard Headquarters at St. Elizabeths on time in 2013 because they received adequate funding at the beginning of the consolidation project.

Funding has decreased since that time, impeding DHS and GSA’s efforts to make significant progress. The Government Accountability Office acknowledged in a September 2014 report that a lack of funding was responsible for delays in building the Secretary’s Office as well as headquarters for four components: the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Transportation Security Agency, Customs and Border Protection, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

At its inception, the DHS Headquarters Consolidation Project was justified on the basis that it was going to centralize leadership, enhance operations, save taxpayer money, and improve morale.

The more time that goes by without Congress providing adequate funding for the project, the less likely those benefits will be achieved. This is especially true of achieving taxpayer cost savings.

DHS components and offices that should have already moved into owned space at St. Elizabeths are extending expensive leases in the D.C. area.

Long-term leases result in unnecessary costs to taxpayers and mean less money spent on conducting DHS's mission.

Enough time has elapsed that the Transportation Security Administration—a DHS component that was originally scheduled to move to St. Elizabeths—is instead building a new headquarter in Springfield, Virginia.

Given the inception of the Department of Homeland Security in 2003 and the support of the Bush Administration, if I may, I would suggest renaming St. Elizabeths Campus to the George W. Bush Homeland Security Center. Maybe that will get Congress to fund it.

Scaling back the project as originally envisioned brings into question whether the intended benefits of consolidation, such as enhanced operations, will be achieved.

Given the changes being made to the original master plan, DHS and GSA owe taxpayers a clear picture of the path forward for future consolidation.

Today, I look forward to discussing with the witnesses how we can continue to make progress at the St. Elizabeths campus to realize the benefits of the DHS Headquarters Consolidation Project. With \$2 billion already spent on the project, DHS cannot afford to fail.