



**Statement of Subcommittee Chairwoman Martha McSally (R-AZ)
Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee**

*Keeping Pace with Trade, Travel, and Security:
How Does CBP Prioritize and Improve Staffing and Infrastructure?
April 19, 2016*

Remarks as Prepared

U.S. Customs and Border Protection's job is to make sure the passengers and cargo that power our economy keep moving while keeping bad things and bad people out of the country.

These missions require two basic prerequisites – an appropriate number of well-trained CBP officers to process travelers and trade, and a modernized infrastructure to accommodate and channel the traffic so that it moves across the border quickly and safely.

However, CBP is seriously understaffed, despite Congress's recent infusion of dollars to hire an additional 2,000 officers. Additionally, land ports of entry across the country are in dire need of expansion and renovation to keep pace with increasing demand and security requirements.

CBP is well below its Congressionally-mandated staffing level by more 950 Officers and 1300 Border Patrol Agents. Even with a recent push to hire more officers, hiring is only barely keeping up with officer attrition. We are essentially treading water.

CBP's internal workflow staffing model shows that we need more than 2000 CBP Officers above what CBP currently has on-board, well above even what Congress has appropriated. Once CBP delivers the now late staffing report, as required under the recently enacted CBP Authorization Act, Congress will have a clearer picture of where the needs are greatest.

Filling staffing shortages is a challenge for several reasons. For starters, just last year it took more than 460 days, on average, and 11 distinct steps to on-board a new officer or agent. Today it's only marginally better – the process is down to 6 months. That is still a very long time.

We are losing far too many good applicants who just throw up their hands, and move on because they have given up on the process.

Pre-employment polygraph examinations required by the Anti-Border Corruption Act of 2010 significantly reduce the number of applicants who make it through the process – including a disturbingly high number of seemingly qualified combat veterans. I want to make sure we are vetting potential applicants thoroughly without subjecting them to a process that is adversarial without purpose.

Attrition is also something that should concern CBP. When we have good officers and agents leaving the force in significant numbers and the hiring process is not keeping pace, we must look for novel ways to retain these professionals. At the current hiring rate, it takes almost 100-150 applicants to go through the

process just to hire one agent or officer. This means CBP needs to have hundreds of thousands of people apply just to meet our current needs.

Last year, President Obama signed a bill I authored, the Border Jobs for Veterans Act. This law allows the hiring of qualified veterans on an expedited basis, and establishes programs to actively recruit military veterans to work as CBP Officers. I look forward to an implementation update because we can all agree that CBP should be leveraging military veterans who want to continue to serve their country.

Turning now to infrastructure challenges, there are 167 land ports of entry nationwide – many are in dire need of expansion and modernization. For years, funding for ports of entry has been inadequate, considering the magnitude of the requirements. If we tally the total requirements for ports of entry across the country it comes out to an astounding \$5 billion dollars.

How CBP prioritizes land port of entry construction is not as clear as it should be. Under current law, CBP is required to present a 5 year infrastructure plan to Congress on a routine basis, which I understand will be delivered shortly. What Congress is looking for in such a plan is a rational decision making process for selecting and funding infrastructure based on specific criteria: impact to the economy, the level of traffic, and necessary security enhancements.

The main border crossing in my district, located in Douglas, AZ, is a prime example of the confusion that exists with the current process. The Douglas crossing point is one of six ports of entry in Arizona and the City of Douglas has been attempting to secure the approval of a new Commercial Port of Entry with DHS since 2012.

Unfortunately, determining how to further this vital project still remains not only relatively unclear, but frustratingly difficult. Mexico is my state's largest trading partner and over the past five years, shipments south alone have increased 60%. The Douglas port currently accounts for nearly \$4 billion in trade through two-way truck traffic, a figure that has grown by 5% annually since 2010.

But what is hard to measure is the opportunity cost of inadequate and aging infrastructure that causes bottlenecks and long wait times. We may never know how much commerce Douglas is not seeing because that cargo may be shifting to another port of entry not in such dire need of modernization.

In 2013, the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) determined that the existing Douglas POE will not allow CBP to adequately meet its mission within the next five years. That deadline is rapidly approaching and I am extremely interested in moving along projects, whether it is improvements or expansions of the existing port or building a new port all together that will ensure that commerce continue to move in an efficient manner and the citizens of Southern Arizona remain safe.

I hope that the witnesses today can help this subcommittee find solutions that will ease the staffing shortage and prioritize infrastructure spending in a transparent and justifiable way.

###