



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

*“Life on the Border: Examining Border Security through the Eyes of Local Residents and Law Enforcement.”
May 9, 2016*

Remarks as Prepared

The Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security will come to order. The Subcommittee is meeting today to examine border security through the perspective of our local law enforcement, border patrol agents, and residents.

Before we proceed any further, as Chair, I need to make a few important announcements.

It takes a tremendous amount of work putting this hearing together, and I appreciate the interest that is shown by the number of people who are in attendance today. I also would like to thank the town of Sahuarita, Arizona for hosting us today and for allowing us to use their excellent facility.

Because this is an official Congressional hearing, as opposed to a town hall meeting, we must abide by certain rules of the Committee on Homeland Security and the House of Representatives. I kindly wish to remind our guests today that demonstrations from the audience, including applause and verbal outbursts, as well as the use of signs or placards, are a violation of the Rules of the House of Representatives. It is important that we respect the decorum and the rules of this committee. I have also been requested to state that photography and cameras are limited to accredited press only.

Thank you in advance for your understanding. I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

A few weeks ago, I convened my first hearing as the Chairwoman of the Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee on the important topics of border security effectiveness and situational awareness.

My Subcommittee heard from Border Patrol and CBP Air and Marine leadership on the conditions along the border from their vantage point.

The testimony given by these government officials established further that there is a deep disconnect between what politicians and policymakers in Washington D.C. say about our current situation to secure the border and what I hear on a daily basis here at home. This is not surprising considering many policymakers in the nation’s capital have never seen or experienced our situation along the border, something Southern Arizona residents live with every day.

At my first hearing, Border Patrol officials stated that they have the ability to interdict and apprehend more than 80% of the illegal traffic on the southwest border, which sounds like an improvement from the last time we measured operational control of the border in 2010, which stood at 44%.

But the Border Patrols numbers only take into account what they see, the numerator, and fail to include all activity, the denominator, so it is an incomplete, if not misleading figure, that does not give an accurate assessment of current strategy's effectiveness.

At the same hearing, after I pressed them, CBP admitted to having only roughly 50% situational awareness of the border. That means, of illicit activity coming across our nation's roughly 2000 mile Southwest border, CBP only knows what is happening with certainty in half of it.

The truth is that the border is not as secure as it needs to be, and the Department of Homeland Security for years has, been trying to sell the American people a false narrative that the border is more secure than ever.

Local law enforcement, business and community leaders, ranchers and residents-those I represent and have met with and spoken to on countless occasions-have a different perspective. They also have a better understanding of the very real border security challenges faced by our fellow citizens because they live and work here and experience the ramifications of an unsecure border every day.

Viewing the border through the eyes of local residents, like those before us today, arms policymakers with first-hand experiences on what is and isn't working in border security efforts. And at the end of the day, I want to get down to the business of finding thoughtful, common-sense solutions to improve border security.

We are fortunate to have brave men and women of the Border Patrol do all they can with the tools they are provided. However, they are often hampered by outdated, flawed strategies and political leadership that does not have the resolve to let them do what agents do best – secure the border and protect the Homeland.

Rural border security is a difficult task. Agents do a difficult job, often alone, in rugged terrain. They are subject to a rising number of assaults, which are not frequently prosecuted, and on a daily basis put their lives on the line to prevent cartels from trafficking drugs, money, people, and weapons through our communities.

Local law enforcement officers are often willing and able border security partners, so we need to properly fund and equip them through programs like Operation Stonegarden in order to assist the Federal government's efforts. Information sharing, joint operations and collaboration should be the pillars of this approach and will help maximize the results for the community.

And every day our fellow citizens, including many in attendance here today, must endure the hassle of a border security checkpoints, fear the consequences of illegal activity on their property, or have their businesses harmed by a perception of the border that does not totally square with reality.

Legislation I authored that recently passed in the House directs the Border Patrol to develop a new strategy that is based on a full assessment of the threats along our southern border, including where we have vulnerabilities, the impact of terrain, where we have gaps in situational awareness and operational control, and where the drug cartels are beating us.

Having a frank and honest discussion about what the witnesses see and experience on the border, and their proposed solutions will help us ensure our nation's border security efforts protect the citizens who live and work on the border every day, as well as secure the nation.

We have a very diverse group of witnesses today to provide important perspectives on the challenges, complexities, and solutions regarding border security. As the saying goes: "where you stand depends upon where you sit" and maybe for this topic, perhaps it should be "where you stand depends upon where you live and work."

From reading the written statements, we have some different viewpoints and disagreements between some of our witnesses on a variety of topics. I look forward to a fruitful, spirited, but respectful discussion and debate. And I would ask that we all consider that we can learn from each other today and find common ground, since we all have the desire to keep our country and communities safe.

I very much look forward to the testimony of our witnesses today, each of whom brings a unique and important perspective to this discussion. I want to especially welcome the Gentleman from New Mexico, Mr. Pearce, to Arizona. Mr. Pearce represents the 2nd Congressional District of New Mexico, which borders Arizona's 2nd Congressional District to the east and is also home to many miles of the southwest border.

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