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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement

Hearing on “Force Multipliers: Examining the Need for Additional Resources to Disrupt Transnational Crime at the Border and Beyond”

March 8, 2023

I think we all care about a safe and secure border. We care about stopping human trafficking. We care about taking on the fentanyl crisis, prosecuting traffickers, and using every tool in our nation’s toolbelt to shut down cartels.

The technologies we use to accomplish these goals are remarkable. I look forward to having a Customs and Border Protection K9 team here to demonstrate how service animals bolster national security. I want to thank Commissioner Sabatino and Director Salisbury for being here today and for your service to our country.

In November 2021, President Biden and Congressional Democrats passed an infrastructure bill with the support of only 13 House Republicans. That legislation included \$430 million for CBP to expand facilities and improve screening capabilities at our ports of entry.

The FY 2023 appropriations package—passed with the support of only 9 House Republicans—provided another \$130 million to CBP to hire additional workers at our ports of entry and to invest in more innovative and efficient technologies to speed up inspections at the border. I mention this because I want to remind folks that Democrats are and continue to be committed to national and border security.

I hope this hearing helps us better understand the tactics and technologies that work to disrupt cartels, secure our ports, and facilitate commerce. I look forward to learning how Congress can help provide and deploy resources effectively to make our country safer—a goal the Biden Administration leads on.

I am particularly interested in this issue because I represent the Port of Long Beach. It’s the second largest container port in America. The American people earn \$5 billion a year in Customs revenues from the Port of Long Beach and its sister port in Los Angeles. More than 2.6 million jobs throughout the United States are linked directly to Los Angeles and Long Beach-generated trade. My district is an engine of commerce for this nation. I care deeply about making it efficient and safe—providing it optimal resources and effective technologies.

It’s the federal government’s job to foster commerce and ensure that the goods that drive our national economy move safely and quickly through our ports of entry. Through our experience with COVID-19, we have seen how quickly bottlenecks at our ports can ripple through our entire economy.

Yet we must strive to strike the perfect balance between security and commerce. It is critical, therefore, that we adequately strive to screen all vehicles and cargo for dangerous drugs, contraband, and threats—and do it efficiently. We must be particularly focused on solutions and innovations for our southern border, which is vital to our economy and processes millions of vehicles and cargo containers on an annual basis.

In fact, Mexico is our second largest trading partner, with billions of dollars in goods and services and hundreds of thousands of people flowing between our countries every day. One study found that a ten-minute reduction in wait times for each commercial vehicle at the border could generate hundreds of millions of dollars in additional revenue each year for the American economy—with the benefits extending to non-border states as well.

I know some people like to fantasize about sealing the border, shutting down our asylum system, or invading Mexico to declare war on the cartels. But these fantasies are neither reasonable, feasible, nor smart.

Instead, we should be making every effort to streamline our border crossing processes and make it safer for commerce and immigrants alike. This goal means bolstering processes to facilitate lawful immigration, and to address the root causes of migration in regions like the Western Hemisphere.

This hearing offers us an opportunity to understand how we can further the Biden Administration’s work to secure our border and disrupt cartels by using canines, technology, and other innovations to the greatest possible extent.

I am the only immigrant to serve on this Subcommittee. I will staunchly defend the ideals on which this nation was founded. As a result, I will not let this hearing become a forum to demonize vulnerable immigrants or to pull political stunts that mislead the American people.

Let me make one thing crystal clear: many of the problems we discuss today will not be solved by a wall at the border. An orderly border demands expanding legal pathways to citizenship. No wall, whether concrete or technological, can enact the comprehensive immigration reform that our country desperately needs. That job is exclusively ours.

When we welcome hardworking immigrants into our communities—those who work, pay taxes, and come to build better lives for themselves and their families—we all benefit. We have always been a nation of immigrants. We cannot stop people from wanting to come and build better lives here, nor should we. I look forward to a productive opportunity to engage with our witnesses today.

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