

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Dan Lipinski (D-IL)
Subcommittee on Research & Technology
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Joint Subcommittee Hearing
Subcommittees on Research & Technology and Oversight
“Technology Needed to Secure America’s Border”
July 31, 2014

Thank you Mr. Chairman for calling this hearing today, and thank you to the witnesses for providing valuable testimony on this issue.

Today we will hear about how the Department of Homeland Security can improve its research and development efforts on technology to secure America’s borders. With growing turmoil around the world, the threats we face at our borders are more pressing than ever. These threats include terrorists and criminals entering our country, human trafficking, drug trafficking, and other dangerous materials and substances being smuggled into the U.S. As has been said many times, those wishing America harm only need to get it right once – to keep America safe, we need to get it right every time. This daunting task falls largely on the shoulders of DHS. As a member of both the Science, Space, and Technology Committee and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I am especially concerned with border security as it relates to transportation. Last week I met with the Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Gil Kerlikowske, on their efforts to develop technologies such as the fingerprint scanners at O’Hare Airport in Chicago as part of CBP’s Global Entry program.

Science and technology plays a critical role in addressing our homeland security challenges. However, the Department has been plagued with problems in its planning and management of research and development. The agency is young, having only been created 11 years ago. While I do not envy the task of stitching together several government programs and functions into a new agency, I remain concerned that several of the problems we saw in the agency’s initial years remain today.

As GAO has previously stated, the Department cannot tell us how much they invest in R&D. There is a lack of effective communication between operational components and the Science & Technology Directorate. Furthermore, there is still no strategic plan in place to guide the Department’s research and development activities.

It is important to understand the steps the agency goes through when identifying and solving a technological problem, whether for border security or another mission need. When agents in the field identify a technological challenge, how is this need passed along to the researchers developing the technology? The communication between the operational components of DHS and the researchers at the Science & Technology Directorate must be improved.

Once a technology is developed it must be thoroughly tested and evaluated to see that it not only functions as intended, but is adapted for the environment in which it will operate. Understanding how CBP agents or other customers in the field will use the technology and what additional improvements should be made is a key step in successfully deploying the technology. Without understanding the human elements in this process, I am concerned we could be investing significant federal resources in potentially unusable technology. I look forward to hearing from Dr. Eyerman about the importance of social science in the evaluation and deployment of new technologies at DHS.

Securing our borders is a difficult and complex problem. People and materials can enter by air, land, and sea. This requires our border security efforts to not only effectively communicate internally, but also coordinate with other federal agencies, as well as state and local governments. I hope our discussion today provides the Committee with recommendations to inform our oversight and legislative responsibilities for R&D at the Department of Homeland Security. And I look forward to hearing about how public and private sector innovation can help protect the American border.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I yield back the balance of my time.