

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
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. The issue before us today is an important area within this Committee’s jurisdiction. This can be a constructive hearing if Members focus on the science and technology concerns at the Department of Homeland Security and not let it turn into a forum for debating the ongoing events at the Southwest border or other issues related to our immigration system. There are other venues for those debates, and those broad issues cannot be solved with new technologies. However, there are many threats that can be addressed with technological innovations.

As a Texan, I fully understand the complex challenge of securing our nation’s borders. Detecting and preventing the illegal entry of dangerous individuals and substances is the highest priority of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents. Protecting America’s border requires innovations that keep us ahead of those who wish to do us harm. Innovation begins with investment in R&D. It is the responsibility of this Committee to provide oversight of the Department’s research activities to ensure the most effective technologies and innovative solutions are provided to the agents and other operators on the front lines.

DHS has experienced many growing pains during its first ten years. Technology failures are an accepted part of the research process and are indicative of R&D that is on the cutting edge. However, government failures due to inadequate testing and evaluation or poor coordination within the agency cannot be an accepted pattern at the agency. I look forward to hearing about potential improvements that could be made to ensure DHS R&D investments are well-managed.

While it is unfortunate that we are not hearing from DHS today, I look forward to GAO’s recommendations on what DHS can do to improve the process of transitioning useful technologies to the field while limiting waste and duplication. I understand DHS’s Under Secretary for Science and Technology will be appearing before the Committee soon and the recommendations from these experts here today should provide useful input to that discussion.

Such recommendations will also inform our thinking as we begin discussions of a reauthorization of the DHS Science & Technology Directorate with our colleagues on the Homeland Security Committee.

In closing, I want to welcome our witnesses to this hearing and I look forward to your testimony. With that, I yield back the balance of my time.