

Chairman John Cornyn

Opening Remarks

Subcommittee Hearing: “Trade and Commerce at U.S.
Ports of Entry”

- Good afternoon. Thank you for being here today.
- The topic of today’s hearing, “Trade and Commerce at U.S. Ports of Entry,” is one that is absolutely vital to my home State of Texas.
- Texas is home to 29 air, land and sea Ports of Entry, more than any other state in the nation.
- Included in that list are three of the five busiest land ports of entry, and the number one inland port, in terms of total volume, along the entire U.S.-Mexico border.

- To further put this in to perspective -- about half of all U.S.-Mexico trade moves through a Texas port of entry.
- I am pleased to have Kevin McAleenan with us today, the Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection.
- Commissioner McAleenan and the Office of Field Operations within CBP are charged with screening goods and travelers at these ports.
- We owe a great deal to the men and women who serve at these Ports of Entry day in and day out.
- Last year, CBP continued to experience remarkable growth in terms of travel and trade.
- Over 390 million travelers were screened at land, air and sea ports, and nearly \$2 trillion worth of imports were processed.

- The volume of commerce crossing our borders has tripled in the last 25 years.
- While this continued growth is an overall positive for our economy, we simply won't be able to maintain it without appropriately addressing staffing and infrastructure needs.
- While it is incumbent on the federal government to ensure that CBP has adequate resources to carry out its core functions, Congress must also conduct effective oversight to make sure they're meeting mandates, implementing GAO and OIG recommendations and operating with efficiency.
- It is concerning to me that as of 2017, despite congressional mandates to hire additional personnel, CBP still has a staffing shortage of 2,500 officers.
- The GAO continues to reiterate that this shortage in trade enforcement positions has led to increased wait

times, which in some cases, could result in shortened vetting processes and security risks.

- In addition to staffing shortages, CBP officers are forced to work in outdated infrastructure, creating conditions that may affect their ability to expedite inspections and process travelers through high-volume ports.
- In 2015, CBP self-reported a study that revealed the need for \$5 billion to meet its infrastructure and technology requirements.
- At the border, antiquated infrastructure often leads to unnecessary delays, which results in an overall loss of commerce.
- In many instances, these delays are translated into costs for an entity that ultimately are passed on to the American consumer.

- It is critical that we make port of entry infrastructure investment a top priority – so that we can adequately staff and fund the ports of entry that make trade possible in the first place.
- I am proud to have sponsored legislation, now in law, that directly addressed this issue -- the Cross-Border Trade Enhancement Act, which codified the Reimbursable Services Program and the Donations Acceptance Program.
- Public-private partnerships are an effective way to give stakeholders and CBP the ability to make improvements at all types of ports, while also saving taxpayer dollars.
- A number of Texas ports of entry, particularly in the land and air space, have already seen the benefits that this program can provide.

- I also look forward to discussing today other initiatives currently undertaken by CBP to ease the burden on legitimate trade and travel.
- Programs like the Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (CTPAT), the NEXUS/Preclearance Program, the FAST Program, and Global Entry can have great benefits for our national security and for the consumer and traveler.
- Further, programs like these allow CBP officers to focus on higher risk goods and travelers.
- Finally, I look forward to hearing from Commissioner McAleenan on implementation of the Trade Enforcement and Trade Facilitation Act (TFTEA), which moved through this Committee a couple of years ago.
- TFTEA, which officially authorized the Office of Field Operations and streamlined a number of trade

enforcement and facilitation issues, has the potential to further enhance our nation's trade policy.