

Opening Statement
Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Senate Finance Committee
Subcommittee on International Trade, Customs and Global Competitiveness Hearing on
“Trade and Commerce at U.S. Ports of Entry”

I want to thank Senator Cornyn for his work and our work together on what has become a series of subcommittee hearings on important matters for our national security and our economic security. Our Customs officers protect both our national and economic security. A secure border must be a priority, and Democrats and Republicans have worked in a bipartisan way to secure \$14 billion in funding for Customs and Border Protection, including \$1.6 billion for border security. As we work to secure our borders, it’s also imperative that our immigration laws are humane and uphold American values. The Administration’s policy of separating children from their families is an insult to those values and we must insist that families are reunited. The Administration must get this done. There’s no reason why we cannot develop a border policy that is both humane and protects our national security. It is also imperative that we ensure the safe and secure flow of commerce and have the appropriate staffing and funding levels to prevent unscrupulous actors and trade cheaters from profiting from the sale of dangerous or illicit goods.

It has been two years since the enactment of the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act, so called TFTEA, where we worked in a bipartisan way to provide customs with new and expanded authority to combat child and slave labor, to protect intellectual property, and combat those attempting to evade out trade laws.

Our customs officers are on the front lines of this fight, working to prevent pirated goods from harming U.S. businesses, or dangerous fake goods from harming or even killing consumers. Our customs officers are responsible for an enormous area of responsibility, from interdicting opioids like fentanyl, to illicit goods, adapting to an ever-evolving threat matrix, to our agricultural specialists who protect us from imported pests and disease, and ensuring countries like China who cheat on trade cannot circumvent our trade laws.

But our customs officers are under strain. Staffing shortages mean that officers are asked to work double shifts – 16 hour days. Some are asked to serve 90 day tours away from their home and families at facilities that are short-staffed. It’s impossible for this not take a toll on an officer’s family’s home lives. Commissioner McAleenan, I know this is something that’s important to you as well, and I appreciate that.

Safeguarding our long-term competitiveness also means making a sustained and coordinated investment in our infrastructure. Trade is not simply about exports to the rest of the world; it’s about American-made goods flowing to destinations across our nation. Our inland waterways are critical to that competitiveness.

Our inland waterways provide an economical, environmentally friendly mode of transportation. From Pittsburgh to Louisville, to the Twin Cities, to St. Louis, our inland waterways are responsible for shipping billions in American goods throughout our nation.

Our inland waterway system served as an economic backbone for our country as we grew and expanded, connecting pioneers with the rest of our country, bringing goods from our landlocked states to the coast. This system remains the linchpin of our intermodal system. One of the first things you see at the port of Pittsburgh are the rail lines; they are truly integrated in the American supply chain, connecting businesses and their products to markets across the country.

Keeping our waterway infrastructure navigable is critical to competitiveness for the entire nation. To serve our growing U.S. markets, we must make the kind of concerted infrastructure investments that our parents had the good sense to provide for us. And we must ensure at the same time that agencies tasked with protecting our nation have the funding they need to execute their jobs to the fullest.