



Chairman John Carter

*Subcommittee on Homeland Security
House Committee on Appropriations*

FY 2016 Budget Request for the Department of Homeland Security

March 26, 2015

Opening Statement As Prepared

Today's hearing is called to order –

Mr. Secretary, welcome. It's good to have you back to testify on the President's fiscal year 2016 budget request for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Last year, you testified on a budget that was already developed by the time you came on the job. This request, however, is a true reflection of your priorities, and we look forward to having a robust discussion.

The FY16 budget for DHS is \$41.2 billion, an increase of \$1.5 billion above fiscal year 2015.

Mr. Secretary, there is a lot to like in the request. I have concerns too, but for the first time since I've been Chairman. I am pleased with many recommendations. The request: prioritizes DHS's frontline operations and personnel; doesn't include unauthorized fees as offsets; and complies with the law by funding 34,040 detention beds.

With its focus on preventing terrorism, securing the border, administering immigration laws, safeguarding cyberspace, and strengthening national preparedness, I believe the request is a very constructive, first step in the appropriations process.

Some highlights include:

- \$9.1 billion for CBP's mission to protect America's borders, while still allowing the free flow of trade and travel that is vital to our economy.
- \$3.3 billion to deter illegal entry into the United States with full funding for 34,040 detention beds, 129 fugitive operations teams, and the increased use of alternatives to detention.
- \$4.8 billion for TSA to fund screening personnel, training, equipment, and other resources in support of more efficient, and more traveler-friendly, screening methods.
- \$1.9 billion for the United States Secret Service – a \$273 million increase – to improve perimeter security of the White House, for better training, and to cover the costs of several upcoming events, including the 2016 Presidential campaign. It's worth noting that the budget proposal mirrors recommendations made in the United States Secret Service Protective Mission Panel.
- And \$818 million to protect and strengthen the government's ability to counter cyber-attacks on critical information technology systems and infrastructure.

Funds are included to care for at least 58,000 unaccompanied children, and I look forward to hearing from you on the latest apprehension trends, and whether the \$162 million contingency fund is required.

I want to commend you for making management reform a top priority. Improving decision-making processes and strengthening back office functions is never easy; yet, the department is making progress under your leadership.

I'm pleased to see many senior-level vacancies have been filled.

Even GAO gave DHS positive marks in their latest "High Risk" report. So...keep up the good work.

For all that's good in the request, there are some problems.

To begin, the \$1.5 billion increase absorbs almost 75% of non-defense, discretionary spending available under the limits of the Budget Control Act of 2013. Mr. Secretary...the Congress intends to live within the confines of the law even if the Administration does not. As a result, I doubt DHS's budget will rise as steeply as the request proposes.

Within FEMA, a new \$300 million climate change initiative is proposed at the expense of first responder, and state and local grant programs.

Across all DHS components, hiring front-line personnel is not happening in a timely manner, resulting in large carryover balances. ICE and Secret Service aren't keeping up attrition. NPPD has major staff shortages. And CBP continues to struggle to hire the 2,000 officers funded in FY14. Only 700 are on board today.

The hiring problem doesn't have just budgetary implications. At DHS, an inadequate force structure could lead to national security and public safety concerns. Mr. Secretary, this is a problem that needs a solution. It must be fixed.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention two major frustrations. Last week, I read in the press that ICE released 30,000 criminal aliens into U.S. states and communities in 2014. Once again, the releases were made without notice to Congress, and we don't know whether the releases endanger public safety. What really annoys me, however, is that many of the criminal aliens were released from detention because their countries of origin would not repatriate them. I realize the law requires this result...but it is wrong...and we need to figure out how to fix it.

Lastly, Mr. Secretary, you know that I am completely opposed to the executive actions issued by memo under your signature last December. Those memos jeopardized the FY15 conference agreement, and transformed it from a law enforcement and public safety measure into a battleground for a fight between the executive and the legislative branches of government. Though the fight was a legitimate use of the legislative process, the actions caused unnecessary dissension and partisanship that is damaging to DHS's mission to protect Americans from terrorist threats and to secure the borders.

I have directed the subcommittee staff to report to me on any departmental actions that appear to violate the injunction issued by the federal District Court in Brownsville, Texas. You're on notice. As an attorney, I know that you will respect the authority of the court, and that you will demand the same from your staff.

With that, I would like to recognize Mrs. Roybal-Allard, our new distinguished Ranking Member, for any remarks she'd like to make.

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