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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Moving the Line of Scrimmage: Re-examining the Defense-in-Depth Strategy

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

September 13, 2016

Having served as both Chairman and Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security, I have had the opportunity to visit many communities along the southern border, hear from community members directly, and watch the men and women of the Border Patrol carrying out their duties on behalf of our Nation.

I have seen the triple fence near San Diego, ridden along the border with ranchers in Arizona, and observed Border Patrol agents processing unaccompanied children in South Texas.

I know that each area of the border is different, the challenges facing each area are different, and therefore the appropriate way to address these challenges is often different as well.

After visiting southern Arizona at the request of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and others and meeting with constituents there, I have firsthand knowledge of residents' concerns and a better appreciation for the challenges confronting Border Patrol in the region.

Our 2012 Government Accountability Office report helped quantify how Border Patrol utilizes its resources in each of its southern border sectors, including the Tucson Sector.

So while today's hearing title implies that Border Patrol has moved its personnel and resources away from the border entirely, that is simply not the case.

There is tactical infrastructure and technology in use and agents patrolling even in remote areas of the border, though not to the extent that residents in these areas would like.

I look forward to hearing from the new Chief of the Border Patrol, Mark Morgan, about how he is deploying Border Patrol personnel and resources to meet these challenges.

As the first Chief in the history of the Border Patrol to come from outside its ranks, Chief Morgan is uniquely positioned to guide the Patrol going forward.

Also, given his background as Assistant Commissioner for Internal Affairs at CBP, I hope to hear today how he plans to ensure the Border Patrol adheres to appropriate Use of Force protocols, addresses possible misconduct, and ensures the utmost professionalism among all Border Patrol agents.

On the second panel, we have a group of border stakeholders to lend their expertise to the discussion today.

I am especially interested to hear their opinion about Border Patrol's interior checkpoints, including whether they contribute to border security and how they affect law-abiding Americans in and around border communities.

I know Border Patrol considers checkpoints an integral part of its defense-in-depth strategy.

However, I also understand residents in the region are concerned about being stopped as they go to work or school, visit friends and family, and go about their daily lives.

I, too, am concerned about the potential for civil liberties violations and potential racial profiling at such checkpoints.

There are many who would prefer to see these resources utilized at the border instead and understandably so.

If Border Patrol is going to operate checkpoints away from the border, it must have protocols in place to protect the rights of U.S. citizens and maintain metrics that prove their effectiveness.

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