

**Opening Statement  
Congressman Matt Cartwright, Ranking Member**

**Subcommittee on Health Care, Benefits, and Administrative Rules  
Committee on Oversight & Government Reform**

**Joint Hearing on “A Review of the Department of Homeland Security’s Policies and  
Procedures for the Apprehension, Detention, and Release of Non-Citizens Unlawfully  
Present in the United States”**

**February 25, 2015**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

Let me begin by saying that I just returned from the Texas-Mexico border last week where I visited the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge with Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection Gil Kerlikowske and Edward Avalos, the Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs at the United States Department of Agriculture. I met with individuals from Customs and Border Protection (CPB) who work tirelessly to ensure that our border is secure.

During this trip I witnessed how vitally important our trade relationship with Mexico is. My state of Pennsylvania exports 3.44 billion dollars’ worth of goods to Mexico each year, accounting for 246,409 jobs. Chemical exports make up our top export sector in Pennsylvania, accounting for \$868 million and 25 percent of the state’s total exports to Mexico. In addition, another \$632 million in primary metal manufacturers are exported to Mexico.

I also spent some time walking the streets of McAllen, Texas where I saw block upon blocks of thriving stores catering to Mexicans who come to the U.S. to do their shopping. Our working relationship with Mexico is enormously important to our safety and economic security and as I saw last week, DHS’s work it vital to that mission. In fact, the men and women of DHS do more than secure our border from undocumented immigrants; they also inspect our imported fruits and vegetables so as to prevent harmful insects from infecting crops in this country. Without their important work, our agricultural industry could stand to lose billions of dollars. Mexico is the largest supplier for fresh and frozen fruit to the U.S, accounting for over 30 percent of the volume and value of fresh and frozen fruit imports. These men and women are integral to keeping our food supply safe.

My trip also confirmed that the Administration is shifting resources to the border to strengthen enforcement efforts. The Administration has been sending hundreds of additional Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to the border and increasing ground surveillance systems. According to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) data, the number of Border Patrol agents increased from 17,499 in FY 2008 to 21,391 at the end of FY 2013. In addition, in fiscal year 2014, DHS conducted 414,481 removals and 162,814 returns. Customs and Border Protection (CPB) made 486,651 apprehensions.

I appreciate today's hearing to examine the President's priorities outlined in the November 20 Memorandum. It seems to me that the President is enforcing our laws and focusing his limited resources on targeting immigrants who are criminals, threats to national security, and public safety risks. ICE only has the capability of removing 400,000 illegal immigrants per year, just 4% of the total illegal immigrant population. Given these limited resources, it's crucial that we spend this money wisely.

I am, however, troubled by the hypocritical efforts of some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who are threatening to hold the DHS funding bill hostage unless it defunds the President's immigration actions. This is exactly the type of Washington politics that the American people are tired of. The American people sent us here to pass laws. To work together. To solve problems. Not to defund the very law enforcement efforts we want at our borders and throughout this country. I too have questions about some of the President's actions, but I will not support these destructive efforts by my colleagues.

I will continue to support a tough but fair path to citizenship. I believe illegal conduct must be punished with fees and fines, and the most dangerous undocumented persons deported. I support a bipartisan approach to dealing with immigration issues, like the Senate-passed bill from the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress that was endorsed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Farm Bureau. Such a plan would bring undocumented immigrants out of the shadows and transform them into tax paying individuals who pay their fair share into our health care system and Social Security.

I would also like to stress that I am disappointed that the majority only gave DHS three business days notice for this hearing because I would have liked to hear from DHS regarding its policies on detaining and releasing detainees with criminal convictions. I would have liked to fully understand the mandatory laws and the discretionary practices that guide these decisions. But I look forward to hearing DHS' response to the Committees' questions and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.