

Statement of Ranking Member Tom Carper
“Dogs of DHS: How Canine Programs Contribute to Homeland Security”
Thursday, March 3, 2016

As prepared for delivery:

During multiple visits to our Southern and Northern borders, I’ve been impressed by the many ‘force multipliers’ that help our border security officers maximize their effectiveness. Often, these force multipliers are high-tech – night vision cameras, aerostats, and surveillance planes.

But sometimes our officers get critical help from some low-tech friends. I’m thinking of the horses that guide Border Patrol agents through dense brush, or – as we will hear about today – of the gifted dogs who can sniff out threats that would be invisible to humans.

As we will hear, and perhaps even see, in moments, specially trained dogs can detect people or things that humans or machines might easily miss. Canines are already at work across a number of DHS programs. For instance, DHS uses dogs to check for explosives within our airports and train stations. We also see dogs hard at work at and between our ports of entry where they attempt to detect the illegal entry of people and goods.

We know that the special abilities of these animals have already contributed to our homeland security. For example, canine teams are credited with helping CBP seize more than 4,500 pounds of heroin in fiscal year 2015. That same year, dogs helped to track thousands of migrants along the Southwest border, and discovered 83 people hiding in vehicles crossing through ports of entry. Other dogs have helped detect illicit plants or animals, while some helped find human remains near the border.

Security is not the only mission for canine teams. Dogs have been invaluable in search and rescue efforts following natural disasters. This is an area where I’m not sure we are doing enough to take advantage of their capabilities.

At the same time, these valuable tools are not free. Dogs with the proper abilities and temperament to conduct searches are expensive to buy and even more expensive to train and deploy effectively. As with all of our security investments, we must make sure we are deploying these canine teams in a cost-effective way.

Today we will hear about some of the open questions regarding canine teams. In particular, GAO has taken a hard look at TSA’s canine program and raised some important questions about how and where they are trained and deployed. While TSA has successfully addressed some of GAO’s earlier concerns, I understand that other questions remain.

I look forward to hearing from both agencies about the current status of their canine programs and plans for the future. We also need to drill down on what these canines can and cannot accomplish and what information is needed to make sure we are making the right investments in these force multipliers.

“With that, I would like to thank our witnesses for being here and for sharing these wonderful dogs and their trainers and handlers with us today.