

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
Wednesday, April 5, 2017
“Improving Border Security and Public Safety”

Good morning and welcome. Since becoming Chairman of this Committee, we have convened 22 hearing on improving border security and public safety. These hearings examined the southwest, northern, and maritime borders. We assessed incentives for unlawful migration to the United States and how America’s insatiable demand for drugs fuels supply from further south.

We also looked at ways to enhance border security and public safety. We heard from ranchers, sheriffs, and border patrol agents about the state of America’s borders, as well as fencing, technology, and manpower needs. We also heard a widow from Missouri and a local law enforcement officer in Washington State explain how an insecure border and lax immigration policies took the lives of innocent Americans.

So, what did we learn? We learned that:

1. Our borders are not secure.
2. America’s insatiable demand for drugs is one root cause, perhaps THE root cause preventing the achievement of a secure border.
3. To truly secure our border, we must identify and eliminate—or at least drastically reduce—the incentives for illegal immigration.
4. Some key incentives driving unlawful migration are the opportunity to work and the security in knowing that, upon illegal entry, you will probably be able to remain in the United States.
5. We need a layered approach to border security, one that includes fencing, technology, manpower, a commitment to the rule of law, and the elimination of incentives that encourage illegal immigration.
6. In order to secure our borders, agents need full situational awareness, which includes the ability to see on the other side of the border. This can be achieved with appropriate fencing or technology.
7. Fencing works, and we need more of it.
8. Hiring is a challenge, and personnel issues must be addressed.
9. The Ports of Entry (POE) must not be forgotten, as the majority of drugs enter the country through our POEs.
10. Tragedies have occurred as a result of our insecure borders. Tragedies that could have been prevented.

Today, we welcome Secretary Kelly to discuss the Department’s efforts to improve border security and public safety. To assist the Secretary, it is important that we confirm qualified nominees for the Department’s senior leadership team. I am pleased that the Senate voted overwhelmingly to support Deputy Secretary Elaine Duke’s nomination yesterday. Secretary Kelly now has his second-in-command. I am committed to working with the Secretary and the members of this Committee on addressing the issues identified above. Together, we can secure our border, a goal all of us share.

I want to thank Secretary Kelly for attending today’s hearing and I look forward to your testimony.