

Opening Statement of Representative David Price, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security Hearing on the FY '12 Budget for Customs and Border Protection

March 9, 2011

Commissioner Bersin, I welcome you back to the Subcommittee as you present your budget request for fiscal year 2012.

Over the past few years, the size and assets of CBP have grown substantially. Since 2006 just five years ago the number of Border Patrol agents who patrol the Mexican and Canadian borders and the coastal waters surrounding Florida and Puerto Rico has grown by 70 percent, from 12,349 to 21,370 Border Patrol agents funded in 2012.

Meanwhile, the number of CBP officers has grown by 18 percent to more than 21,186 officers funded in 2012, largely to enhance Southwest Border port of entry operations. Your 2012 budget request reflects your heavy reliance on people for all of your activities, with over two-thirds of the request funding salaries and benefits alone.

From 2010 to 2012, salaries and benefits grew by \$1.1 billion. Consequently, this leaves very few dollars to invest in new technologies and tools for your personnel, and to conduct maintenance on your facilities. Moreover, during this time of fiscal restraint, you most likely will be asked to do more with less. We need to make sure that in doing so, critical operations are not negatively affected.

Commissioner Bersin, your agency carries out one of the core functions of DHS - keeping dangerous goods and people out of our country while facilitating lawful cross-border movement. Accomplishing that task in an ever-changing threat environment requires an agency that is flexible and forward-leaning making good use of intelligence and preferably intercepting threats before they reach our borders.

A good example of that approach is the Immigration Advisory Program, which places CBP officers in foreign airports to stop potential terrorists from boarding flights to the U.S. I commend you on progress on this initiative and am pleased to note the expansion of this program in your budget request, along with additional funds to improve our targeting capabilities. Recognizing the staffing needs at our ports-of-entry, I'm also glad you're proposing 300 new CBP officers and new canine teams.

And I want to call attention to your efforts in the critically important area of officer integrity. Specifically, you've proposed \$26 million to enhance CBP's polygraph program and conduct timely background investigations.

I also have some concerns about what is missing from this request. There is no new funding for air cargo security even though CBP informally asked this Committee to provide additional resources after the attempted air cargo bombing plot out of Yemen last fall. The budget substantially reduces funding to your facilities, delaying maintenance, repairs and alterations.

It reduces Air and Marine programs, which your own budget brief says ``will reduce the ability to safely and effectively transport personnel and equipment in support of border security missions``. And finally, the budget contains changes in maritime container security efforts that seem to be at odds with what both the Secretary and CBP have been proposing for the past few years. I look forward to discussing each of these in detail during the hearing today.

Commissioner Bersin, we hold the men and women of CBP in the highest regard and place great value in the work they do day-in and day-out. Many operate in very dangerous areas and have laid down their lives to protect us. I know we will discuss this in much more detail next week at our hearing on Southwest Border violence.

As we begin this hearing to more closely examine your 2012 budget, it's important to note that no program or account will be off limits to scrutiny. Our obligation is to take a balanced, realistic approach; to weigh risks carefully, and make prudent investments. Commissioner Bersin, I have no doubt that you share this point of view, and I look forward to working with you this year.