

Statement of Ranking Member Ralph Hall (R-TX)
Markup of H.R. 3916
February 7, 2008

Chairman Wu, thank you for holding this markup and for your co-sponsorship of H.R. 3916. It has been a pleasure working with you, Chairman Gordon, and the other Members of the Committee to move this bill forward. I'd also like to thank Mr. McCaul for the substantial contribution he made to the bill.

Last week, in his State of the Union address, President Bush emphasized the great importance of securing our nation's borders. I believe this is a crucial issue for this Committee to address and am very pleased to see H.R. 3916 making steady progress.

Border security is a concern of all members of Congress. We have nearly 7,500 miles of land border with Canada and Mexico, over which half a billion people and over two million rail cars pass per year. In addition we have over 300 ports that see over nine million cargo containers each year.

We have a number of reasons for wanting strict control over this traffic. For instance, according to Department of Justice statistics, over 30,000 kilograms of cocaine, heroine, and meth were seized within 150 miles of the US/Mexico border in 2006. I know many Members of this Committee have worked tirelessly to end the scourge of meth in our nation. Yet, success at restricting access to meth ingredients here in the States has led drug dealers to import more across our borders. Stopping the flow of narcotics across our border remains key to our efforts to curb illegal drug use.

The threat of terrorism also compels us to re-examine our borders. Whether we're talking about foreign groups trying to infiltrate our country or home-grown terrorists seeking weapons and supplies, our borders remain a critical element of our defenses

Finally, in fiscal year 2005, US Border Patrol agents apprehended 1.19 million people attempting to enter the country illegally. While I understand the concerns many Members have regarding comprehensive immigration reform, we should not allow that issue to stymie progress deterring terrorists, drug smugglers, and human traffickers.

H.R. 3916 is a positive step towards reducing our vulnerabilities at the border. Section 1 requires S&T to include cost and operational objectives in any near-term application development. This section is meant to ensure there are baseline requirements for operational as well as technical objectives. Sections 2 and 3 set up instruments to provide DHS with expert guidance from preeminent scientists, first-responders, and emergency managers on an ongoing basis.

Section 4 directs the Secretary of DHS to take an active role in safely incorporating unmanned aerial vehicles into the national airspace. Before this promising technology can be utilized regularly, the safety and effectiveness of "sense and avoid" technologies must

be demonstrated. DHS has an excellent opportunity to work collaboratively with the FAA to collect this necessary data.

The tunnel detection program described in Section 5 aims at a persistent smuggling problem. Organized crime has the time and resources to avoid most border surveillance by simply digging right past them. However, detecting tunnels is remarkably difficult over broad expanses of land and water, finding solutions will require advanced technology. This section creates a sustained program at DHS S&T to meet this need.

Finally Section 6 creates a sustained program to defeat counterfeiting. DHS S&T, however, does not have a devoted office or program in this area despite the clear impact on agencies such as ICE and CBP. The technologies that this program will focus on will ensure that travel, import, and identification documents are safe and secure.

I believe this Committee is ideally positioned to strengthen control of our nation's borders through legislation supporting effective, efficient, and evolving defenses. H.R. 3916 begins this effort. The sections in this bill reflect a single underlying theme: the Science and Technology Directorate at DHS needs to establish long-term goals and objectives for border security and broaden science and technology community involvement.

I look forward to bringing this bill to the full Committee later this month and thank you for your support.