

Chairwoman Loretta Sanchez (D-CA)
Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism
Committee on Homeland Security
Hearing on "The Secure Border Initiative: SBInet Three Years Later"
September 17, 2009

Opening Statement, as prepared

Today's hearing will further examine the Department of Homeland Security's Secure Border Initiative physical infrastructure fencing as well as the virtual fence known as SBInet. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today and I want to thank Mr. Stana with GAO for his frank and honest assessment of this initiative. The witnesses' testimony and responses to our questions are critical parts of the oversight our Subcommittee continues to conduct on the Secure Border Initiative and SBInet.

As you all know, we have many questions about the operation and outcomes to date in the SBInet program.

Given that the Boeing SBInet contract is expiring soon, this hearing will give us an opportunity to assess the progress, or lack of progress in this program.

I am particularly concerned by the SBInet program's ongoing struggle with transparency and the pattern of delaying planned deployments.

For instance, in May of 2008 I had the opportunity, along with other members of this subcommittee, to travel to the Tucson sector and review SBInet's Project 28 and hear about the beginning stages of Ajo-1 and Tucson-1.

I was assured that these new projects would be fully operational and able to be accepted by DHS by the end of the 2008. I am extremely disappointed that the new deadlines estimate that Tucson-1 will be ready for a December 2009 acceptance and Ajo-1 will be ready for a June 2010. Based on past experience, I am hesitant to believe that these new deadlines will be met.

In the last series of hearings on this topic, the subcommittee was given hard dates and assurances that deadlines for specific SBInet projects would be met by Boeing.

However, weeks later the deadlines were pushed back. SBInet's full deployment along the southwest border, now estimated by Boeing and CBP to occur in 2016, will be 7 years after the original contract end date of 2009.

This situation is very troubling since in the mean time border patrol agents must continue to use older and less capable technology, which is frequently hindered by maintenance issues.

Furthermore, as a member of Congress who is very concerned about fiscal responsibility, it is hard for me to believe that DHS would award a contract of 1.1 billion dollars over 3 years and continue to award task orders without viable results.

Moving to the other half of the Secure Border Initiative, the physical border fence has also risen in cost.

The cost of pedestrian fencing has increased from 3.5 million dollars per mile to 6.5 million dollars per mile, and the cost of vehicle fencing has increased from 1 million dollars to 1.8 million dollars per mile.

In addition there is the ongoing cost of maintaining the fencing after near-constant breaches.

According to program data there has been over about 3,300 breaches in the fence, which cost \$1,300 dollar per breach to repair.

This being said, we have yet to see whether or not this fencing has increased border security and justified its costs.