

**STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN HENRY CUELLAR (D-TX) as
prepared**

**Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global
Counterterrorism and
Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight**

**Joint Hearing on:
‘SBIInet: Does it Pass the Border Security Test?’**

March 18, 2010

Today, the Subcommittees are meeting to examine SBIInet – the Department of Homeland Security’s latest effort to secure our Nation’s borders using technology.

As a Member of Congress representing a district along the U.S.-Mexico border, I have been interested in the program since its inception 4.5 years ago.

I believe strongly that technology plays a vital role in securing America’s borders.

Unfortunately, however, SBIInet has been plagued with technological problems and deployment delays from the start.

Bottom line, there hasn’t been a good return on the investments made in SBIInet. In fact, to date only 28 miles of SBIInet technology have actually been deployed along the border.

And even those miles – known as Project 28 – are of limited operational value.

The slow pace of deployment has frustrated many of us. Especially in the face of escalating drug trafficking and violence just across the Southern border.

At the current rate of 28 miles every 4.5 years, it would take 320 years – or until the year 2330 –to deploy SBIInet technology across the Southwest border.

That statistic would be comical if the subject matter were not so serious.

I know Secretary Napolitano understands what the stakes are, as a former border Governor, she understands what we’re dealing with.

We have to deploy security swiftly, but effectively.

That’s why I am pleased to have a witness from the Government Accountability Office before us today.

Mr. Hite will discuss the results of the latest in a series of Secure Border Initiative engagements GAO has conducted at the request of the Committee on Homeland Security.

I am concerned about GAO's finding that the number of new defects identified in the SBInet system is generally increasing faster than the number being fixed.

Meaning we were taking one step forward, yet two steps back.

I am also troubled by GAO's finding that: changes made to certain testing procedures appeared to be designed to "pass the test" instead of being designed to qualify the system.

If tests were being rigged, how do we know the Border Patrol won't ultimately be stuck with technology that deserved a failing grade?

Over the years, GAO has conducted about 17 reviews of DHS' border security technology deployments.

While DHS generally concurs with GAO's recommendations, DHS hasn't always followed their recommendations.

I hope that the Department will take these recommendations seriously in the future, on all findings.

Now, we've all heard Secretary Napolitano's recent announcement on SBInet.

And I support using \$50 million in Stimulus Funds to purchase proven border security technology.

And I agree that we should be completing ongoing deployments before deciding how – or whether – to proceed with SBInet.

At the same time, I am concerned the announcement is a signal that SBInet is about to follow suit of its two failed predecessor programs, ISIS and the America's Shield Initiative.

I hope the Department is working on a "Plan B" if that's the case.

Because those of us along the border have waited long enough for a security solution that works.

Looking forward, I hope Secretary Napolitano will continue to review my request for a UAV along the Texas Border.

As part of an integrated technology approach, a UAV could fill the gaps of SBInet. Something to consider for the near future and in light of recent violence.