

**Prepared Statement by Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Border Security and Immigration
Hearing on “Building America’s Trust: Progress on the Southern Border”
May 23, 2017**

I want to thank Chairman Cornyn and Ranking Member Durbin for having this very important hearing today. Effectively securing our Southern Border has been a concern for years, and it is one of the most persistent challenges facing the federal government. Amid transnational drug trafficking, unauthorized immigration, and international terror threats, securing our border remains a major security challenge.

When President Obama first took office in 2009, Congress and the Bush Administration had made enormous strides in border security. Working together in a bi-partisan fashion, we increased the number of border patrol agents by 59%, from 11,000 to 17,500, and added hundreds of miles of fencing and other infrastructure on the U.S.-Mexican border. These measures paid off, and in the last year of the Bush Administration more than 1.1 million people were apprehended at the border, with almost 706,000 people caught at the Southern Border alone. Although we hadn’t achieved full operational control, we were on the right track.

Unfortunately, those gains were all-but-lost under the Obama Administration. During the first full year of the Obama Administration, only 900,000 people were apprehended at all border points of entry. By President Obama’s last year in office, that number had fallen to a paltry 530,000, a 51% decrease from the Bush Administration. While supporters of the Obama Administration claim that illegal immigration also decreased over the same time period, they ignore a vital point: the reduced apprehension rate allowed more people to enter our country illegally, in violation of our laws.

The Obama Administration’s own Department of Homeland Security found that while illegal entries decreased, so did the chance of apprehension. In 2015, only 54% of unauthorized immigrants were apprehended at points of entry at the Southern Border. This lackluster enforcement, along with President Obama’s catch and release policies and non-existent interior enforcement, encouraged a huge influx of unauthorized immigrants, some of whose entry wreaked havoc on law-abiding Americans.

Thankfully, the Trump Administration has taken concrete steps to reverse President Obama’s open-border policies and restore lawfulness to our nation’s immigration system. By tightening border controls and unshackling ICE agents, the Trump Administration has sent a clear, simple message to unauthorized immigrants: America’s laws will be enforced. This message is resonating, and illegal immigration is down more than 60% since the President took office.

While I commend the Trump Administration, and Deputy Commissioner Vittiello, for their progress, the fact remains that more needs to be done. Congress needs to work with the

Administration to find measures to both increase apprehensions and deter illegal entry. While Deputy Commissioner Vittiello will testify about the need for increased surveillance technologies and port-of-entry improvements, Congress should also consider a number of other common-sense measures. Among other things, we should provide more funding for:

- CBP and ICE to hire thousands of additional law enforcement officers, just like the President has called for;
- Completing the construction of all 754 miles of border fencing required under the Secure Fence Act; and
- The implementation of an automated entry and exit control system at all points of entry, as Congress has required in eight separate laws going all the way back to 1996.

These measures are common-sense, simple solutions that don't require any additional legislation. Instead, all Congress has to do is adequately fund these priorities. Plain and simple.

I look forward to Commissioner Vittiello's testimony, and to hearing his thoughts on what additional measures are needed to enhance security at our Southern Border. Working together, I'm confident that Congress and the President can come up with solutions that will help us reach our goals of truly securing our borders.