



# U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

**PRESS RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

April 11, 2013

Contact: Rob Blumenthal (202) 224-1010 / Eve Goldsher (202) 224-3751

## **CHAIRWOMAN MIKULSKI HOLDS OVERSIGHT AND FY 2014 BUDGET HEARING FOR DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

*Mikulski thanks Department of Commerce civil servants working to keep our economy rolling*

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.), Chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science (CJS), today chaired a fiscal year 2014 oversight and budgetary hearing for the U.S. Department of Commerce. The hearing included testimony from Acting Secretary of Commerce Dr. Rebecca Blank and Commerce Inspector General Todd Zinser.

“The Commerce Department is a major economic engine for America,” Chairwoman Mikulski said. “. . . Today, I want to examine how these funds will advance America’s interests in protecting American ideas, including safeguarding our intellectual property and enforcing our trade laws, protecting our citizens with forecasting and warning about severe weather, and protecting taxpayer dollars. Those are my goals.”

Senator Mikulski’s opening remarks in full, as prepared for delivery, follow:

*“Welcome to the Commerce, Justice and Science (CJS) Subcommittee’s first hearing on the FY 2014 budget. I would also like to welcome back to CJS our Ranking Member and my Full Committee Vice Chairman Senator Richard Shelby. Senator Shelby and I have worked together on Appropriations for many years, and I’m glad to have him back with me on CJS. Having the Full Committee leaders serve as the leaders of CJS means that this subcommittee will lead by example. We will try to finish our work on time, working across the aisle and across the dome.*

*“In my first 90 days as Chairwoman, we passed the urgent Sandy Supplemental, as well as the Continuing Resolution (CR) for Funding, which avoided a government shutdown and closes the books on 2013. The CR gave us the certainty that we could keep the government open, and showed that we can govern. As the Full Committee Chairwoman, I am committed to bringing the Appropriations process back to regular order. I know that Senator Shelby shares this goal.*

*“As of yesterday, we have the President’s budget request, and I just want to give a few quick observations. I support the President’s budget level of \$1.058 trillion. That is the same deal we made three months ago in the American Taxpayers Relief Act and I believe that it will be at the \$1.058 trillion level that this Full Committee will be marking up.*

*“In terms of dealing with sequester we need a balanced approach, and we call upon the leadership and the President to help come up with that balanced approach so that we can cancel the sequester. Also, we support the President’s initiative in having a more frugal government; emphasizing cutting wasteful spending, cutting improper payments, and reducing administrative overhead. We’re going to be working with him on that and with our friends on both sides of the aisle to show that this Committee can have a great sense of frugality.*

*“I also want to commend the President’s focus on creating jobs, the focus on manufacturing, innovation and technology -- particularly revitalizing infrastructure, be it the super information highway or our real highways -- and also our investment in education and training. I have a very serious concern about his approach to earned benefits, and also to federal employees, but those are comments for another day.*

*“Today, we’re meeting to examine the Commerce Department’s FY2014 budget request. We welcome Acting Commerce Secretary Dr. Rebecca Blank and Commerce’s Inspector General Todd Zinser, who we will speak to a little later. Dr. Blank has been serving as Acting Secretary since June 2012, and has been a leader in the Department since June 2009. I understand that Dr. Blank will soon be leaving the Department to become the next Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Congratulations on your new position.*

*“I want to thank Dr. Blank for doing a fantastic job under enormously difficult circumstances. She has been a true reformer for Commerce. She personally oversaw the accountability to correct the Weather Service Antideficiency Act violations, and responded to NOAA’s satellite mismanagement problems. We are sorry to see her go, but we look forward to hearing from her today about the Department’s budget and priorities.*

*“The Commerce Department is a major economic engine for America. The President’s request totals \$11.7 billion for the department, including \$3.1 billion in patent and trademark fees. Today, my goal is to examine how these funds will advance America’s interests in protecting American ideas. This includes safeguarding our intellectual property, enforcing our trade laws, and protecting our citizens with forecasts and warnings about severe weather. It also means protecting taxpayer dollars.*

*“The Secretary of Commerce is the chief spokesperson for American business and the chief manager to fix major challenges at the Department. The Inspector General and the GAO have identified persistent problems that need strong oversight. Namely, these are NOAA’s satellite procurement, the next Census and the patent backlog.*

*“The Department of Commerce needs to be cyber-obsessed. It needs to create ways to protect its own Dot-Gov systems, while working with the private sector to better protect Dot-Com. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Commerce’s outstanding science and research agency, is helping the private sector find new ways to solve today’s cybersecurity problems.*

*“The President issued an executive order in February calling for a national strategy to better protect ‘critical’ U.S. infrastructure from cyber attacks. NIST is a critical leader in executing this executive order. NIST’s budget request of \$934 million includes \$95 million for cyber activities. I want to know how these funds will be used to protect consumers’ identities and companies’ intellectual property.*

*“NIST is not the only agency standing sentry to protect American innovation. The International Trade Administration enforces our trade laws and agreements, and protects entire American industries. ITA’s budget request of \$529 million includes \$20 million for the Interagency Trade Enforcement Center, which increases our ability to challenge unfair trade practices.*

*“The Patent and Trademark Office protects American ideas and inventions, which are the heart of prosperity and jobs. While the PTO has made progress in reducing the patent backlog over 650,000 patents are waiting for approval, and it takes two and a half years to grant a patent. I also want to make sure that PTO’s networks are secure. American inventors are filing applications electronically. We must make sure the filing process is secure so no one can steal inventions that Americans worked hard to create.*

*“When it comes to protecting people, every member of this Subcommittee is pro-weather and pro-science. America has experienced several severe weather events these past few years, and scientists suggest that the freaky weather will continue. NOAA’s satellites need to be fit for duty. We owe it to our communities – to the coastal states that depend on accurate hurricane forecasts, and to the interior states that depend on timely tornado warnings. Commerce’s budget highlights new reforms to NOAA’s satellite programs in response to recommendations I made to move these programs to NASA, and of critical reviews made by outside groups. I welcome these changes, but remain critical and skeptical of the stability of these important programs.*

*“The Inspector General has identified several serious issues that continue to challenge the Department, particularly the planning and management of the next Decennial Census. Controlling costs for the 2020 Census remains one of my top concerns, and is a top oversight concern for the Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office. Cost overruns were a major problem during the 2010 Census, but the 2014 budget request suggests that the Census Bureau intends to reduce the 2020 Census costs back down to 2010 levels. I want to know what is being done to keep this cost profile on track, on schedule and on budget.*

*“I want to thank all the men and women of the Commerce Department – all the trade experts, statisticians, patent and trademark examiners, scientists and engineers, weather forecasters. They work hard every day to promote American businesses, protect American ideas and resources, and keep our economy moving forward.*

*“Thank you, Dr. Blank, for your service to the Department of Commerce. We look forward to hearing your testimony.”*

###