



Chairman John Carter

*Subcommittee on Homeland Security
House Committee on Appropriations*

FY 2017 U.S. Customs and Border Protection Budget Request

March 1, 2016

Opening Statement As Prepared

Hearing is called to order –

Today we welcome Gil Kerlikowske, in his third appearance before the subcommittee. Commissioner, welcome...we appreciate you being here and your service to DHS and the Nation.

The fiscal year 2017 budget for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is \$13.9 billion, an increase of \$686 million above fiscal year 2016. Unfortunately, gimmicks in the department-wide budget have created a \$2 billion gap that requires this subcommittee to make hard choices. Therefore, the increase to CBP may not be affordable when evaluated in the totality of the budget request.

Commissioner, as you and I discussed last week, CBP has a hiring problem that must be fixed. To secure and expedite trade, the budget requests funds for 23,861 CBP Officers, which includes the 2,000 officers funded in fiscal year 2014. Commissioner, taking four years to hire 2,000 CBP officers is too long. I know you plan to send a request to the authorizers asking them to pass legislation increasing the number of CBP officers. But why would they increase passenger costs knowing that wait times won't decrease because CBP isn't likely to have these officers on board for years?

Likewise, Border Patrol is losing more agents than it can hire. Currently, CBP is 1,268 agents below the mandated floor. The budget takes advantage of this by decreasing the mandate for agents by 300. Unfortunately, the reduction isn't supported by any analysis proving that border security won't be compromised as a result.

Commissioner, you understand the important national security role these agents play. But we're concerned that CBP isn't able to sustain the existing work force; let alone the mandated floor level of agents. These are urgent problems which must be fixed. How do you plan to correct this spiral?

The request also includes a contingency fund for a potential surge in unaccompanied children. We look forward to an update on the current estimate of UACs.

Other increases include: \$55 million for tactical communications; \$47 million for vehicles; \$26 million for aerostats and relocatable towers; and many other smaller increases. I look forward to working with you over the next several weeks to determine the priority of each of these programs.

The request proposes a realignment of the appropriations structure to be more mission focused. While I know it was challenging it is an effort that I have supported for several years, and I want to commend you and your team on their efforts.

Lastly, Commissioner, sovereign nations control and manage their borders and sustain the integrity of their immigration systems. These objectives are your duty, and I expect nothing less from you, and from the men and women of CBP.

Now, let me turn to our distinguished Ranking Member for any remarks she wishes to make.

#####