



TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE

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Introduction

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Cuellar, and Members of the Subcommittee, I'm honored to appear before you today to discuss the critical mission of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and how the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 President's Budget supports our operational priorities.

It is a privilege to represent the more than 65,000 dedicated and talented men and women of CBP who protect our nation from ever-evolving threats, while also promoting our country's economic growth and prosperity. CBP operates around the clock to prevent the entry of inadmissible persons and contraband into the United States at and between our nation's ports of entry (POEs) and to ensure the safe and efficient flow of lawful trade and travel. These are complex and difficult responsibilities that CBP personnel perform with vigilance, integrity, and professionalism.

CBP faces many serious challenges across our operational environments and throughout our mission spaces, including counterterrorism, irregular migration, the threat of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) engaged in drug and human smuggling, emerging agricultural risks, and the evasion of, and noncompliance with, trade laws. We continue to address these complex and dynamic challenges with unwavering commitment and resolve.

CBP recently announced its 2024-2028 Strategy,¹ which recognizes the vital importance of sound advance planning and operational agility to adapt to the dynamic nature of the agency's operational environments. The Strategy prioritizes our workforce and provides an actionable roadmap for the implementation of our mission over the next several years.

I could not be more proud to work alongside CBP's dedicated agents, officers, and specialists who continue to make countless advancements in everything from preventing terrorists, criminals, and drugs from harming our communities; to combating forced labor and counterfeit products in supply chains; to rescuing and assisting those in distress and responding to increased levels of migration with dignity and humanity.

I would like to acknowledge and extend my sincere thanks to the Members and staff of this Subcommittee for your consistent support of, and commitment to, CBP's mission by ensuring we have the resources necessary to protect this country. Continued investments in CBP's workforce, technology, and infrastructure allow us to be more efficient and effective in meeting our broad array of complex security and facilitation responsibilities.

Today, I will discuss how CBP is making use of those critical resources and detail how the FY 2025 President's Budget supports CBP's enduring mission priorities: countering terrorism, combatting transnational crime, securing the border, protecting revenue, and streamlining and facilitating lawful trade and travel.

FY 2025 President's Budget and Strategic Funding Priorities

The FY 2025 President's Budget contains more than \$16.6 billion in net discretionary funding for CBP. This includes more than \$650.0 million for investments in effective and modern border security and management resources to enhance our technology, assets, and facilities; improve mission capabilities; care and support our workforce; and manage migration in an orderly, safe, and

¹ *CBP Strategy 2024-2028*, www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2024-Mar/20_0329_cbp-strategy-2024-2028.pdf

humane way. The Budget incorporates the President’s border and disaster supplemental requests transmitted to Congress in October, which included critically needed funding for CBP to secure the Southwest Border, build capacity to enforce immigration and customs laws, and counter trafficking in fentanyl.

Border Security and Management

Thanks to this Subcommittee’s support, CBP continues to achieve its complex, vital mission of safeguarding our borders, protecting our communities, and enhancing our nation’s economic prosperity – a mission that requires the right combination of trained and dedicated personnel, intelligence-driven strategies, collaborative foreign and domestic partnerships, and advanced detection and inspection technology. Using this multifaceted approach, CBP continues to combat the growing reach and influence of TCOs by disrupting their networks, imposing consequences on those engaged in these criminal activities, and enhancing technology and enforcement efforts to interdict illicit drugs and contraband.

The FY 2025 President’s Budget supports CBP’s resource priorities to strengthen border security operations by increasing staffing and technology procurement; expanding domain awareness; and enhancing CBP’s ability to detect and prohibit illegal goods and drugs — particularly illicit fentanyl — from entering the country. These investments will enhance and expand CBP’s enforcement capabilities by increasing our ability to quickly detect and interdict illegal activity along U.S. borders, at POEs, and in the air and maritime domains.

Border Security Between the Ports of Entry

The U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) and Air and Marine Operations (AMO) guard the nation’s borders and associated airspace — an operational area that spans more than 5,000 miles of border with Canada, 1,900 miles of border with Mexico, and approximately 95,000 miles of shoreline — to prevent the illegal entry of people and contraband into the United States.

CBP continues to prioritize national security and deploy resources that strengthen our border security operations and protect the American people. Nationwide in FY 2023, USBP encountered and prevented 15,267 individuals with criminal histories and 598 gang members from entering the United States.

Countries throughout the Western Hemisphere and across the world continue to face unprecedented levels of migration inflamed by violence, food insecurity, corruption, dire economic conditions, failing authoritarian regimes, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States is no exception, and we continue to experience high levels of irregular migration along the Southwest Border (SWB), where in FY 2023 USBP encountered 2,045,838 migrants, including 621,311 family units and 131,519 unaccompanied children. While maintaining an unwavering focus on our primary security mission, CBP strives to ensure that all migrants are appropriately screened, processed, and provided with emergency medical care when necessary.

With the support of Congress, CBP deploys effective technology, infrastructure, and personnel to increase situational awareness and improve our ability to meet daily operational challenges and dynamic threats.

Thanks to prior year appropriations, CBP continues to prioritize hiring efforts and implement its rigorous human capital strategy with a focus on hiring for positions that support the return of

agents to the field. The Budget builds on this approach by supporting the hiring of an additional 350 Border Patrol Agents (BPAs), 310 Border Patrol Processing Coordinators (BPPCs), and 304 additional Border Patrol mission support staff. These additional positions will bolster situational awareness, respond to increased levels of migration along the SWB, improve agent safety, and ensure the efficient management, safety, and care of migrants while in our custody.

Getting agents back on the front line is unquestionably important for border security, but it is also imperative to saving lives. Smuggling organizations continue to abandon migrants in remote and dangerous areas, leading to a dramatic rise in the number of rescues CBP performs. In FY 2023, CBP conducted 5,951 rescue operations, saving more than 42,527 individuals, compared to 22,500 in FY 2022.

A key component of CBP's ability to effectively respond to either an enforcement or rescue event is achieving the highest level of situational awareness of real-time border activity. CBP's use of technology in the border environment is an invaluable force multiplier that increases situational awareness and operational efficiency, enabling agents to be on the frontline, intercepting illegal activity faster and safer.

The Budget supports \$65.7 million for the continued modernization of the Border Enforcement Coordination Network (BECN). BECN consists of systems, services, and equipment that help USBP detect, deter, identify, classify, and resolve illegal border activity and manage its resources effectively. BECN contributes to situational awareness and enhances operational decision-making by enabling real-time information sharing, data analysis, and visualization. Funding will support BECN information technology (IT) systems, equipment, and services needed to sustain system development and operations, and integration with the USBP Common Operating Picture (COP) and Unified Processing (UPro) programs.

USBP's COP ensures all accessible sensor data are transmitted, monitored, and recorded at a USBP Command and Control Center providing a more efficient method to view the activity at the nation's borders. COP improves USBP information management, situational awareness, and decision-making capabilities. The Budget includes \$25.3 million in support of CBP's plan to enhance and expand COP domain awareness capabilities by funding COP installation testing, training, and transition efforts at three additional USBP locations.

Directly interfacing with the COP and sending critical surveillance data to USBP Command and Control Centers, CBP's towers and aerial assets provide vital domain awareness, especially along the SWB land environment. In support of CBP's Integrated Surveillance Tower (IST) program, the Budget provides \$101.8 million to support upgrades for 10 existing Remote Video Surveillance System (RVSS) towers, replacement of 15 obsolete radar systems on existing ISTs, deployment of 15 Consolidated Tower and Surveillance Equipment (CTSE) towers, and maintenance of ISTs along the SWB. IST technology includes both fixed and relocatable towers that provide short, medium, and long-range surveillance, including maritime surveillance capability. The IST technology interfaces with the USBP COP sending information directly to USBP Command and Control Centers for review and coordinating agent response.

Providing critical on-the-ground support to agents and other frontline personnel who respond to border incursions and migrant encounters, UPro standardizes and streamlines case processing and custody management activities, including intake, processing, and detention. Specifically, UPro's

Mobile Intake application provides agents with the ability to perform real-time vetting through the National Targeting Center (NTC) and record checks against Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) watchlist datasets, and foreign partner and Interpol databases, and TECS. Not only has Mobile Intake strengthened frontline personnel safety, since its deployment at key SWB locations in March 2022, it has also saved agents 67,250 hours, equivalent to approximately \$2.5 million or 25 full-time equivalent (FTE) agent positions. While the Budget does not request additional funding to expand UPro in the current fiscal year, it supports CBP's commitment to modernize critical border management processes.

Working in coordination with CBP ground operations, aerial and maritime assets continue to be vital components of maintaining and strengthening CBP's multi-domain enforcement capabilities. In FY 2023, AMO missions between POEs and beyond the nation's borders interdicted 355,273 pounds of illicit drugs, including 256,883 pounds of cocaine and 2,049 pounds of fentanyl; detected 57,670 individuals attempting to evade lawful immigration procedures; and seized \$15.3 million in currency. To ensure we continue to meet operational needs for aerial and maritime surveillance, the Budget funds multiple investments in new aircraft, upgrades to existing aircraft and sensors, and required maintenance services.

The Budget includes \$30.0 million to fund the acquisition and missionization of one Land Interdiction Multi-Role Enforcement Aircraft (MEA). The MEA is the optimal manned aircraft for CBP's mission set and is equipped with advanced sensors for surveillance operations across diverse land and maritime environments. In addition to detection and surveillance, the MEA serves as a force multiplier for state and local law enforcement and emergency response personnel by supporting the rapid-response deployment of equipment, canines, and personnel. The Budget also funds the acquisition of two Light Enforcement Platform (LEP) helicopters and conversion of one HH-60L to UH-60L. This conversion enables essential aerial relocation, transport, tactical response, rescue, and investigative surveillance functions that are critical to CBP's border security operation. The Budget also seeks to maintain and modernize current assets by including \$13.0 million for the replacement of eight obsolete, out-of-production, and expensive- to-support aircraft sensor integrated mission systems, and \$21.0 million to support required aircraft and vessel maintenance.

Continued investments in effective technology and equipment will not only strengthen the security posture of the United States against drug and human trafficking and unauthorized entries across our border, but also increase agent safety, provide improved situational awareness, and improve CBP's ability to respond to detected threats and other urgent situations with the requisite law enforcement resources.

Port of Entry Enforcement Operations

CBP has a complex mission at 328 land, air, and sea POEs, including intercepting dangerous and illegal drugs; preventing the entry of inadmissible individuals; managing irregular migration; and facilitating the flow of lawful trade and travel. Strong investments in CBP's POE workforce and technology are especially critical to CBP's efforts to detect and swiftly respond to dangerous threats, including drug and human smuggling, while also screening foreign visitors, managing irregular migration, inspecting imported cargo, and welcoming returning U.S. citizens.

The expertise and experience of CBP officers and specialists is invaluable to the success of all enforcement and facilitation operations at our nation's POEs. Facing dynamic threats and

increasing workload in POE operations, the Budget supports hiring an additional 150 CBP officers and 121 mission support positions, including intelligence analysts. These critical personnel are highly skilled at identifying and adapting to dynamic POE conditions, and with advanced border security technology at their disposal they're well equipped to counter evolving threats.

In FY 2023, at POEs nationwide, CBP seized approximately 475,000 pounds of illicit drugs, including 70,000 pounds of cocaine, 24,000 pounds of fentanyl, and 124,000 pounds of methamphetamine.² Additionally, CBP seized \$47.0 million in unreported currency and made 3,641 weapons/ammunition seizures.³ Every single seizure is critical. Seizures remove dangerous drugs from illicit supply chains, keep them out of our communities, and deny TCOs valuable profits. Post-seizure analysis provides valuable information that helps identify networks moving dangerous drugs and weapons and supports partner agencies' investigations and prosecutions.

The Budget continues to prioritize investments to disrupt TCO drug smuggling activities by enhancing and expanding our drug detection capabilities and technologies used at POEs. Our highly trained officers use a variety of technologies to detect the presence of illicit drugs, including opioids, in all operating environments.

Deployed to 270 POEs across the nation, CBP's non-intrusive inspection (NII) systems continue to demonstrate their value as part of CBP's layered enforcement strategy to screen for illicit goods and substances, including illegal drugs, entering through land POEs. In FY 2023, CBP officers used large-scale NII systems to scan more than 9.2 million conveyances, aiding in the interdiction of more than 127,000 pounds of narcotics and approximately \$2.8 million of undeclared U.S. currency. To enhance enforcement, while facilitating secure and compliant trade, CBP must continue to close its scanning capability gaps. The FY 2025 President's Budget supports the operation and maintenance of NII system investments to strengthen CBP's inspection capabilities to interdict emerging threats in the land and mail environments, with a primary focus on fentanyl detection. The Budget also supports CBP's ongoing work with industry partners to develop artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities to make the NII image analysis process more effective and efficient by reducing the burden on officer review and increasing enforcement without affecting the movement of legitimate commercial vehicles.

Scientific and Laboratory Capabilities

Multiplying the valuable efficacy of CBP's NII technology, the Budget continues to support the growing frontline operational demand for specialized scientific analysis by enhancing CBP's Forward Operating Laboratories (FOLs). CBP's laboratory and scientific capabilities are critical for facilitating narcotics seizure determinations, in addition to providing scientific analysis to support CBP's counter-fentanyl efforts, as well as those of our law enforcement partners. Thanks to the support of this Subcommittee, CBP will use the funding provided in the FY 2024 enacted appropriation to construct eight new FOLs at strategic frontline locations and a Joint Fentanyl Signature Laboratory (JFSL). The JFSL will support government-wide efforts to combat illicit fentanyl by facilitating CBP, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) scientists to work side-by-side to develop scientific methodologies and perform in-depth laboratory analysis of samples that could link fentanyl seizures back to their

² <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>

³ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/currency-other-monetary-instrument-seizures>;
<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/weapons-and-ammunition-seizures>

origin and smuggling routes. This collaboration will take the data derived from the FOLs to the next level, with thorough, targeted analysis of fentanyl seizures. Incorporating this aggregate data with intelligence and investigative information will provide a more comprehensive and holistic picture of the illicit fentanyl supply chain.

CBP is implementing a comprehensive approach designed to lead the federal government's fight against dangerous drugs like fentanyl and synthetic drugs to stop their destructive impacts on American communities. In October 2023, CBP modernized its strategy to combat fentanyl, other synthetic drugs and precursors.⁴ This new strategy realigns the agency's efforts to focus on expanding resources, enhancing partnerships, and building on the success of targeted enforcement operations. For example, CBP recently launched Operation Plaza Strike,⁵ an operation that targets the gangs and cartels in Mexico that facilitate the flow of deadly fentanyl. This latest enforcement operation builds on preceding operations that focused on seizures of finished fentanyl products, intercepting precursor chemicals, and expanding intelligence on illicit drug networks and tactics. Guided by the new strategy, CBP will continue to combat fentanyl and other illicit synthetic narcotics with every tool at our disposal.

Working with Congress, CBP is also pursuing key proposals that will enhance our efforts to combat illicit fentanyl trafficking, including stopping de minimis shipment exploitation; empowering industry partners to identify and report suspicious behavior; reinstating subpoena authority to investigate suspicious exports; and penalizing unlawful imports. While these legislative changes are focused on countering fentanyl, if enacted, we believe they would enhance CBP's overall trade enforcement operations, allowing for greater action to be taken against forced labor and intellectual property rights violations, as well as increasing compliance capabilities in response to inordinate volumes of e-commerce and small, de minimis/low-value shipments.

Trade and Travel Enforcement and Facilitation

CBP's trade and travel operations are designed to enable CBP to better intercept potential threats prior to and upon arrival at the POEs, while simultaneously expediting increasing volumes of legitimate international cargo and travelers.

CBP facilitates the flow of trillions of dollars in legitimate cargo every year while enforcing more than 500 trade laws on behalf of 49 Federal agencies to protect American businesses and consumers. At the same time, CBP is facilitating growing volumes of international travel across all operational environments.

In FY 2023, CBP processed more than 36.6 million cargo containers through the nation's POEs and conducted 19,722 seizures of goods – valued at more than \$2.4 billion – that violated intellectual property rights. Agriculture specialists conducted more than 1.2 million cargo inspections and intercepted more than 84,000 agricultural pests. CBP officers also inspected nearly 400 million travelers, arresting approximately 16,000 wanted criminals and stopping over 1.1 million inadmissible migrants from entering the United States.

CBP applies a dynamic, risk-based approach, driven by intelligence and data to identify and prioritize action against the highest-risk travelers and goods entering the United States. The Budget

⁴ <https://www.cbp.gov/document/report/cbp-strategy-combat-fentanyl-and-other-synthetic-drugs>

⁵ <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/frontline-against-fentanyl/operation-plaza-spike-fact-sheet>

supports CBP's multi-layered trade and travel operations, which require a highly-skilled workforce as well as technology, intelligence and information capabilities, targeting, international cooperation, and expanded shipper and traveler vetting – all of which contribute to CBP's ability to segment risk, streamline processes, and strengthen enforcement efforts.

In the trade environment, U.S. trade law violators are often attempting to lower costs by adopting unlawful practices. For example, violators use forced labor to lower manufacturing costs, misrepresent the country of origin, mislabel, and undervalue shipments to circumvent Customs tariffs or duty. These types of activities undermine legitimate trade, can result in human rights abuses, and threaten the U.S. economy. As such, CBP continuously focuses on enforcement efforts that safeguard U.S. industries, businesses, and workers from unfair trade practices.

The Budget supports the enhancement of CBP's trade enforcement operations and includes an increase of \$19.9 million to fully fund the sustainment of CBP staffing, technology, strategy and outreach, and training for the enforcement of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) and other forced labor activities. Funding will support capability enhancements to the Advanced Trade Analytics Platform (ATAP) to improve analytical modeling of supply chains and threat indicators of evasion to support enhanced targeting. The Budget also funds the enhancement and sustainment of CBP laboratory investments in isotopic testing, including reference collections and database development to ensure agency operations are not dependent on external support.

The nation's POEs are vital gateways for cross-border travel — a critical sector that drives economic growth and opportunities for American businesses and consumers. In the travel environment, CBP must be flexible, capable, and prepared to respond to whatever approaches our borders – whether it be people or cargo – and adapt to changes in travel, trade, and migration flows. While the threat of our adversaries, such as terrorist groups and TCOs, are persistent, their tactics to evade detection are dynamic and sophisticated.

The Budget supports CBP's travel security operations by funding additional CBP officers and support personnel, maintaining critical technology, and maximizing limited resources by streamlining and modernizing business processes. Continued investments in innovative technological solutions are far reaching and include increased throughput per officer, reduced border crossing wait time, and increased capacity to accommodate increases in border crossing volume. These capabilities also provide more enhanced information about travelers, improving border-crossing security.

Incorporating innovative technology into our comprehensive border management operations, and the collection of advance information that it enables, strengthens the security of our borders, and enhances CBP's ability to address irregular migration challenges without compromising our other missions, including interdicting illicit drugs and facilitating the flow of legitimate trade and travel to ensure continued national and economic security.

Workforce Care and Mission Support Enhancements

CBP's dedicated workforce is the core of all our border security operations and accomplishments. With this Subcommittee's support, CBP continues integrating workforce considerations into every aspect of our planning and operations, as well as in the development of our investment and resource priorities.

CBP is implementing a long-term operational strategy and structure that prioritizes the support and resilience of our dedicated and vital workforce. Building on investments to workforce care programs in FY 2022, FY 2023, and FY 2024, the Budget requests an increase to \$33.2 million to sustain and expand existing programs, while simultaneously supporting the efforts necessary to institutionalize workforce care at CBP. These efforts include expanding Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Core Services, such as the EAP Onsite Clinician Program, Childcare Subsidy Program, and Backup Care Program; enhancing training and development for suicide prevention through chaplain and peer support, Traumatic Incidents & Events Response (TIER) and resilience skills; and improving educational opportunities and other support services for CBP employees and their families.

CBP's Workforce Care Directorate (WCD) significantly increased family support programs in FY 2023, doubling the number of families that can be served through the Childcare Subsidy Program and more than tripling the number of Backup Care Program visits provided. Additionally, CBP expanded on-site clinicians to 15 additional locations and trained 16,170 employees in resilience skills. Additionally, in July 2023, CBP entered into a memorandum of understanding with the National Treasury Employees Union and National Border Patrol Council to support our dedicated workforce and help to remove the stigma surrounding the use of mental health services, resources, and treatment. We also implemented an Alcohol and Substance Misuse Directive that fosters a culture focused on employee safety, wellness, and recovery, and promotes the notion that seeking help and treatment is a sign of strength.

Furthermore, CBP recently launched its newest employee wellbeing tool – the Purposeful website and app. This confidential, free, and easy-to-use resource provides personalized resources, support, and activities designed to help employees reach their personal wellness goals. Purposeful helps identify and address the root causes impacting an individual's mental health and overall wellbeing. The application also connects employees to wellness resources within CBP and local communities, making it easy to access important information when and where employees need it most.

The need for employee support and services continues to increase. In FY 2023, the TIER team responded to three critical incidents,⁶ logging 4,961 contacts; Peer Support and Chaplain members reported more than 80,000 support contacts, and EAP contacts increased by 16 percent compared to FY 2022.

I am grateful for this Subcommittee's recognition of the significant physical, mental, and emotional stresses that impact CBP employees and their families. Tragically, CBP lost 11 employees to suicide in 2021, and another 15 employees in 2022. In 2023, CBP saw a decrease in this trend, but still lost eight employees to suicide. Although the downward trend is positive, even one suicide is one too many.

The FY 2025 President's Budget also recognizes the importance of ensuring CBP personnel work in secure, safe, and functional facilities while carrying-out their complex and critical daily activities. Thanks to Congress, the FY 2024 enacted appropriation includes funding to initiate

⁶ A critical incident is an uncontrollable incident, event or series of events that can overwhelm an individual's defense mechanisms and cause physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological harm. Incidents and events can include natural disasters, direct or indirect involvement in shootings; assaults; hostage incidents; suicides; threats on life; family or property incidents; vehicular, helicopter or airplane crashes; major injuries, or serious illness of a family member or coworker, or witnessing death.

planning and land surveys for an enhanced USBP Checkpoint in Laredo, Texas, which will improve public and BPA safety by mitigating dangerous traffic congestion, enhancing international commerce, and mitigating transnational drug and human smuggling. The FY 2025 President's Budget also supports design services for a new USBP Station in Freer, Texas, and relocation of the current Rochester Border Patrol Station to the Kenneth Keating Federal Building in Rochester, New York. These investments will address deficient processing and holding facilities and promote the safety and security of both agents and migrants in custody.

Additionally, the Budget supports CBP's commitment to being a leader in law enforcement accountability and transparency by funding the expansion of CBP's Incident Driven Video Recording Systems (IDVRS) to 3,600 additional body-worn cameras (BWCs). Funding will also support 100 vehicle-mounted cameras, 200 in-vessel routers, 17,700 holster automatic activation units, and 7,500 vehicle automatic activation units. The request also includes Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) related positions dedicated to conducting video redaction of BWCs being deployed to the field as part of the IDVRS program.

These nationwide investments ensure continued operational effectiveness and promote CBP's commitment to maintaining the highest level of transparency and trust by Congress and the American people.

Conclusion

CBP must balance multiple complex mission sets, including preventing terrorism and processing inadmissible persons while facilitating lawful trade and travel and combating transnational smuggling. Supporting the resiliency of our dedicated workforce and equipping them with effective technology, equipment, and infrastructure strengthens the security of our borders and enhances our ability to address irregular migration without compromising our other missions.

As prudent stewards of taxpayer money, CBP ensures that all investments are made in a smart and cost-effective way, while still meeting border security requirements and complying with appropriations statutes. We will also continue to maximize the utility and effectiveness of prior investments as part of our comprehensive strategy to secure and protect our borders.

Day after day the men and women of CBP safeguard our national and economic security. We are resolute in our commitment to support the wellbeing of our workforce, maintain border security, properly care for those in our custody, and keep our communities safe.

I appreciate the Subcommittee's continued support of our mission and our workforce, and I look forward to your questions.