

WRITTEN STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
For A Hearing Entitled “A ‘Caravan’ of Illegal Immigrants: A Test of U.S. Borders”
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on National Security
April 12, 2018, Washington, DC

Introduction

Chairman DeSantis, Ranking Member Lynch, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement for the record detailing CBP’s efforts to achieve our strategic and operational border security objectives and to enhance our deterrence, detection, and interdiction of illegal cross-border activity.

CBP is responsible for securing approximately 7,000 miles of land border, 95,000 miles of shoreline, 328 ports of entry (POE), and the associated air and maritime space from the illegal entry of people and contraband into the United States. The border environment in which CBP works is dynamic and requires continual adaptation to respond to emerging threats and changing conditions.

Legislative Priorities

When President Trump took office last year, he issued a series of Executive Orders to enhance border security, promote public safety, minimize the threat of terrorist attacks by foreign nationals, and protect American workers from unfair foreign competition. In January 2017, the President signed the Executive Order entitled *Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements* (EO 13767), which directs executive departments and agencies to deploy all lawful means to secure the Nation’s southern border, prevent further illegal immigration to the United States, and repatriate aliens with final orders of removal swiftly, consistently, and humanely. EO 13767 sets a new standard of operational control of the southern border and establishes the foundation for securing the southern border by directing the provision of necessary tools, resources, and policy goals for the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) dedicated men and women to fulfill their critical mission.

But CBP is part of a system which neither begins nor ends at our borders, and innovative technologies and enhanced interdiction capabilities alone cannot prevent illegal crossings. The Administration seeks support from Congress to amend current law to facilitate the expeditious return of Unaccompanied Alien Children (UACs) and family units who are ineligible for relief. The Administration supports correcting the systemic deficiencies that created the asylum backlog, and supports providing additional resources to reduce the immigration court backlog and ensure the swift return of illegal border crossers. CBP looks forward to working with Congress on the legislation needed to enhance the security of our Nation, ensure effective immigration and enforcement, and protect American workers and taxpayers. These legislative needs have a direct impact on CBP’s ability to perform its mission.

CBP remains committed to working with Congress to address these issues in support of the priorities of this Administration and CBP's mission set.

In the interim, and to enhance CBP's capability in southwest border sectors, the Department of Defense (DOD), in conjunction with border state governors, has begun deploying the National Guard to assist in stopping the flow of deadly drugs and other contraband, gang members and other criminals, and illegal aliens into this country. Initial forces are already on the ground assisting CBP by executing missions such as logistical and administrative support, operating detection systems, providing mobile communications, and augmenting border-related intelligence analysis efforts. National Guard members will provide added surveillance, engineering, administrative and mechanical support to our agents on the frontline to allow CBP's agents to focus on their primary responsibility of securing our border. National Guard personnel will not conduct law enforcement activities, will not be assigned responsibilities that require direct contact with migrants, and will not be assigned missions that require them to be armed. CBP is working with DHS Headquarters and DOD to ensure a seamless coordination of efforts.

Personnel

Frontline personnel are a critical resource for improving border security. Mission readiness - the ability to properly train and equip personnel- is critical to CBP's ability to secure the border and protect the American people. CBP remains committed to growing our workforce of dedicated personnel to protect our Nation and the American people.

CBP has faced challenges in the past to meet its hiring goals. However, CBP has taken decisive action, while recognizing that much work remains to be done to ensure CBP has enough officers and agents to meet the Agency's needs well into the future. In the last two years, more than 40 individual improvements to CBP's hiring process have resulted in significant recruitment and hiring gains- despite record low unemployment around the United States and intense competition for highly-qualified, mission-inspired people. With support from Congress, CBP is making investments in our capability and capacity to hire across all frontline positions. CBP is focusing on efforts to attract qualified candidates and expedite their progress through the CBP hiring process.

In the last two years, CBP has undertaken a comprehensive effort to look across all of our recruitment and hiring process areas. CBP implemented process changes that have resulted in significant recruitment and hiring gains. CBP embraced the use of social media, and is working to more effectively identify the best return on investment in digital media. CBP has also introduced a mobile app for applicants in our hiring pipeline to keep them engaged during the process. CBP is going to introduce an "applicant care" component whereby a dedicated employee is assigned to an applicant to help them navigate the process. CBP is also leveraging private sector expertise and experience in recruiting and human resources to provide additional capacity

CBP's streamlined frontline hiring process has led to significant reductions in the average time-to-hire. In the last 12 months, close to 70 percent of new U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) agents and 60 percent of new CBP officers on-boarded in 313 days or fewer, with 17 percent of USBP agents and 19 percent of CBP officers on-boarding within 192 days. This is a significant improvement from the 469-day overall baseline established in January 2016. This streamlined process is reducing the number of otherwise qualified candidates who drop out due to process fatigue or

accepting more timely job offers elsewhere, helping CBP grow its workforce. CBP's background investigation time is approximately 90 days for a Tier 5 level investigation, which is required for all of CBP's law enforcement officer applicants and 90 percent of CBP applicants overall. This is considerably less than the government average for the same level investigation. CBP is also recognized as having a best practice quality assurance program, which other agencies regularly visit CBP to learn about.

As a result of these improvements, CBP's FY 2017 hiring totals surpassed FY 2016 totals by 21 percent for CBP officers, four percent for USBP agents, and 91 percent for Air and Marine Operations (AMO) air interdiction agents. In FY 2017 CBP reached the highest number of USBP agent hires since FY 2013 and the highest number of air interdiction agents and marine interdiction agent hires since FY 2014. The total number of frontline applicants increased by 73 percent between FY 2015 and FY 2017, including a 41 percent increase from FY 2016 to FY 2017.

CBP is also actively working to minimize attrition and fill positions in "hard-to-fill" locations that are often remote and offer very limited amenities compared with metropolitan locations. A stable relocation program will help meet USBP operational requirements and alleviate the workforce's concerns about lack of mobility, which is significantly contributing to increased attrition. CBP is working to develop programs that address attrition through relocation and retention incentives that meet employee aspirations, and at the same time enable CBP to staff these locations. Recruitment incentives are also helpful in attracting new personnel to join CBP, especially for positions in geographic locations that are difficult to fill. CBP is thankful for the continued dedication of Congress to working collaboratively with us to develop solutions to this complicated challenge.

The assignment of USBP agents is determined by leveraging USBP's annual, full spectrum requirements analysis process, which creates a consistent and repeatable, field-driven approach to conducting mission analysis and planning aimed at identifying capabilities gaps across the complex environments the USBP agents work in every day. Capability gaps are captured directly from the field using this process, and are explored through qualitative and quantitative analysis and other evidence to provide information to decision makers about the border security mission space across the northern, southern, and costal borders of the United States. This methodology leads to informed investments that achieve the greatest possible operational impact. As the threats along the borders change, USBP will update this analysis as needed to maximize the impact of future investments.

This process is used by USBP to identify needs related to 12 master capabilities: communications, doctrine and policy, domain awareness, human capital management, impedance and denial, information management, intelligence and counter intelligence, planning and analysis, security and partnerships, access and mobility, command and control, and mission readiness. While the process identifies needs across all 12 master capabilities, four capabilities – impedance and denial, domain awareness, access and mobility, and mission readiness – are consistently prioritized by field commanders as the most important. All of these capabilities and needs are taken into consideration when assigning USBP agents to duty stations.

Infrastructure and Technology

President Trump has directed CBP toward a new standard of border security between the POEs, and defined operational control as the ability to prevent or interdict all illegal border crossings. To make progress toward this standard, CBP will need substantial investments in impedance and denial capabilities, surveillance technology, access and mobility, and mission readiness and personnel. For impedance and denial, a modern border wall system will significantly enhance CBP's efforts to attain operational control of the border between the POEs. Border barrier systems are comprehensive solutions. A wall system that integrates sensors, cameras, lighting, and access and patrol roads, has the support of our USBP agents working our borders and is the direct result of an in-depth analysis of existing capability gaps. Between the POEs, tactical infrastructure, including physical barriers, has long been a critical component of CBP's multi-layered and risk-based approach to securing our southwest border. It is undeniable that border barriers have enhanced- and will continue to enhance- CBP's operational capabilities by creating persistent impedance and facilitating the deterrence and prevention of illegal entries of people and contraband.

The land along the border between the United States and Mexico is extremely diverse, consisting of desert landscape, mountainous terrain, and urban areas. Thanks to the support of Congress across numerous Presidential Administrations today there are several types of barriers, to include steel bollard and levee wall, along nearly one-third, or 654 miles, of the southwest border. Congress provided \$1.4 billion for new and replacement fencing in the FY 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act- the largest investment in border wall in more than a decade. CBP encourages Congress to continue to support the construction of border wall system.

The deployment of proven, effective technology strengthens border security operations between the POEs in the land, air, and maritime environments. Technology complements the operational capabilities provided by tactical infrastructure and enhances CBP's operational capabilities by increasing the ability of the men and women of CBP to detect and identify individuals illegally crossing the border, detect dangerous goods and materials concealed in cargo and vehicles, and detect and interdict illegal activity in the air and maritime domains. For CBP, the use of technology in the border environment is an invaluable force multiplier that increases situational awareness by enhancing the ability of CBP's agents and officers to detect and respond to illegal activity quickly, with less risk to the safety of CBP's front-line personnel. CBP remains committed to adopting innovative technology to keep America and CBP's workforce safe.

Conclusion

The border environment is dynamic and requires constant adaptation to respond to emerging threats and changing conditions. CBP continues to work in close coordination with our partners and the White House to respond to these threats and ensure the safety and prosperity of the American people. With the support of Congress and the White House, CBP will continue to secure our Nation's borders through the risk-based deployment of infrastructure, personnel, and technology.