



TESTIMONY OF

Major General John F. Nichols
Adjutant General of Texas, Texas National Guard

BEFORE

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

ON

“Boots at the Border: Examining the National Guard Deployment to the Southwest Border”

July 24, 2018, 2:00pm
Washington, DC

Good morning Chairwoman McSally, Ranking Member Vela, members of the Committee. My name is Major General John F. Nichols, the Adjutant General of Texas.

The Texas National Guard and Texas Military Department is comprised of over 24,000 Soldiers, Airmen, civilian employees, and volunteers living and working across the state. We are Texans and we respond to Texas and the nation in times of need; through border security in support of the Department of Public Safety, Department of Homeland Security, and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) --- wildfire suppression in support of the Texas Department of Emergency Management and the Texas Forestry Service --- or most notably, in response to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria along our coasts. As always we stand ready to support when called.

General Joseph Lengyel, Chief, National Guard Bureau (and also a Texan) will tell you, and I agree with him, that the National Guard's primary mission is to support the Army and the Air Force in fighting America's wars. Our ability to train for, deploy to, and support the warfight, is our number one role, the number one reason why we exist, and why the United States funds us with federal dollars. The Texas National Guard has always deployed when asked. Since 2001 over 34,000 Texas Guard Soldiers and Airmen have answered our nation's call overseas.

The second mission of the National Guard is to secure the homeland and protect our communities from whatever disaster might hit, whether it's manmade terrorism, border security, or natural disasters. The Guard fulfills this mission every single day across the 54 states and territories and the District of Columbia.

The Guard's third mission is to build partnerships at the local, state, federal and international level. Those partnerships enable both our warfighting and homeland missions, and demonstrate our value to the nation.

As we sit here today, over 2,300 Texas Guardsmen are deployed to locations across the globe in the warfight. In addition to our overseas service members, over 1,200 Texas Guardsmen are deployed to the southwest border, securing the homeland.

Earlier this year, President Trump authorized, as part of this effort, federal funds for up to 4,000 National Guard personnel along the entire U.S.-Mexico border. Governor Greg Abbott committed immediate support of 1,000 troops from Texas. Texas Guardsmen act as a force multiplier to federal, state, and local law enforcement working to secure the Texas-Mexico border. CBP's Operation Guardian Support (OGS) officially kicked off on April 6, 2018 with the first wave of 250 activated Texas Guardsmen. The Texas National Guard is no stranger to the border and has served there in support of state and federal partner agencies for decades.

Texas Guardsmen perform a variety of support roles including motor vehicle operations, logistics support, security monitoring and administrative services, enabling United States Border Patrol agents to return to the field in a law enforcement capacity and build additional capacity to improve operational efficiency. Guardsmen are expertly trained in surveillance and reconnaissance, logistics support, aviation, criminal analysis, linguistic support and other

advanced specialties and systems. The Texas National Guard has unique resources and equipment to support our civilian partners, including its UH-72 Lakota helicopter and RC-26 fixed-wing aircraft.

Guardsmen are deployed to support the needs of the CBP Sector Chiefs along the 5 CBP sectors along Texas' southwest border, from the Rio Grande Valley to El Paso.

Texas Task Force aviation currently along the Texas border includes 11 Lakota helicopters. Six states, in addition to Texas, are supporting with aviation assets, to include Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Oklahoma and Florida. I want to personally thank these partner states for accepting the mission to enhance border security. Task Force Aviation has flown a total of 994.9 hours* since the beginning of this mission.

Guardsmen assigned to CBP's Operation Guardian Support are activated under title 32 duty status, allowing the Governor to maintain command and control of his Guard force. Currently, the 72nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team based in Houston has command and control of Texas' CBP OGS mission, behind the full support of Governor Abbott.

Texas Guardsmen deployed on OGS were sent to the southwest border as complete, ready units. I made the choice to involuntarily deploy these Soldiers on 179 day orders, treating this mission like another deployment. Units were selected strategically at the headquarters level, in order to ensure that units maintain readiness for overseas missions and remain prepared to respond to fires, floods, or hurricanes when called upon by Governor Abbott.

Whenever the nation has been threatened by external dangers or suddenly plunged into war, the National Guard has helped to restore security and safety by defending the homeland. Guardsmen use their skills and capabilities gained from combat and their civilian careers to respond to domestic threats such as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear attacks, large-scale natural disasters, and in the new frontier, cyberattacks. The skill sets of our Guardsmen are strengthened by the diverse deployments we have experienced on state and federal missions. We remain prepared to support Texas and the nation, ready to respond when called.

*numbers current as of 1200, 20 July 18