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ON

“Northern Exposure: Assessing the Evolving Threat Landscape at America’s Northern Border”

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Introduction

Chairman Guest, Chairman Pfluger, Ranking Member Correa, Ranking Member Magaziner, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. We are honored to represent the dedicated men and women of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), who work tirelessly to secure our nation's borders, facilitate lawful trade and travel, and uphold our laws. Our testimony today will focus on CBP's critical operations and strategic resource management along the Northern Border.

The Northern Border, spanning 5,525 miles across 13 states, is the longest international border in the world. CBP's operations across this domain are critical to America's national and economic security, inspecting millions of travelers and vehicles, and processing over \$800 billion in U.S.-Canada trade annually. Though often less publicized than the Southern Border, the Northern Border faces significant threats from narcotics trafficking, transnational criminal networks, human smuggling, and vulnerabilities within trade and travel systems. The problem reached its apogee between 2021 – 2025, with deadly drugs like fentanyl pouring through this border. The region's diverse geography—urban centers, remote areas, and vast waterways—presents unique operational demands. Our mission in this region is multifaceted: to safeguard our homeland, enforce immigration and trade laws, and ensure the efficient flow of lawful commerce and travel. This balance requires continuous evaluation and adaptation of our strategies and resources.

CBP's Operational Footprint on the Northern Border

CBP's presence across the Northern Border is both extensive and diverse, reflecting the unique challenges of this vast region. This includes the Great Lakes maritime domain, which supports heavy traffic from commercial and private watercraft, and drives the regional economy. The Great Lakes maritime border contains 4,960 miles of U.S. shoreline, primarily consisting of commercial marinas, recreational watercraft launches, and private docks. Our operational footprint includes the ports of entry (POEs) managed by the Office of Field Operations (OFO), as well as the expansive areas between POEs safeguarded by the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) and Air and Marine Operations (AMO).

OFO maintains a robust presence across the Northern Border, operating 77 land POEs, 20 crossings, and 21 stations, totaling 118 locations. This extensive network is crucial for managing diverse traffic patterns and the unique challenges presented by the U.S.-Canada border. Our commitment to providing essential services remains steadfast as CBP continuously evaluates port utilization to align appropriate services and staffing with workload requirements. This ensures resources are deployed effectively to meet the high security standards, while facilitating legitimate trade and travel. As of Fiscal Year 2026, Quarter 2, the Northern Border is staffed to 95.9 percent of its allocated staffing level for CBP Officers. The Northern Border is expected to receive up to an additional 218 officer allocations through Working Families Tax Cut Act (WFTCA) funding.

USBP has eight regional sectors across our northern border comprised of 49 unique stations and is charged with securing approximately 5,500 miles of land and maritime borders between the United States and Canada. This mission is critical for intercepting illicit activities by transnational criminal and terrorist organizations, human traffickers, narcotics smugglers, and others who seek to harm our citizens and undermine our national security. The Northern Border,

with its remote wilderness, rugged terrain, and expansive waterways, including the sizeable Great Lakes region, presents unique and often dangerous situations for our agents. For example, the Swanton Sector encompasses approximately 24,000 square miles, including all of Vermont, New Hampshire, and several New York counties, with 295 miles of international boundary, 92 miles of which are water borders. Similarly, the Houlton Sector covers the entire State of Maine, with over 32,000 square miles, 299 miles of land border, 322 miles of riverine and lake border, and 3,478 miles of coastal border. These conditions necessitate innovative strategies, specialized resources, and close partnerships to effectively monitor and secure these regions. Each day, Border Patrol Agents assigned to the Northern Border rise to meet these challenges of terrain, environment, and limited resources.

AMO's Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch is responsible for Missouri, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, western Pennsylvania, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and western New York. This equates to over 410,000 square miles and 1,340 linear miles of water border with Canada. The Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch has marine units in Sault Ste. Marie, Port Huron, and Trenton, Michigan; Sandusky, Ohio; Erie, Pennsylvania; and, Buffalo and Rochester, New York. Air Units are in Selfridge, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; and Buffalo, New York. It conducts air and marine operations that include border security and domain awareness and works with federal, state, and local counterparts to provide investigative support, high-risk warrant support, and security for National Special Security Events.

Further, AMO's National Air Security Operations Center–Grand Forks (NASOC–GF) operates fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft and unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) from Grand Forks Air Force Base. It conducts initial and recurrent UAS training and enforcement operations with manned and unmanned aircraft. Additionally, NASOC–GF aids in disaster relief and emergency response efforts of its federal, state, local, and tribal partners. NASOC–GF conducts land missions, spanning the northern land border of the United States and extending past the coastlines into the maritime domain.

Strategic Resource Management and Operational Efficiency via Technology

Effective resource management is paramount to CBP's mission, particularly given the dynamic nature of border operations. CBP constantly evaluates operational statistics and efficiency at its POEs, stations, and branches to best allocate its limited resources. This strategic approach ensures that we can enforce legitimate trade and travel while also exercising fiscal responsibility.

Working Families Tax Cut Act

Funding provided through the WFTCA will enhance OFO efforts along the Northern Border by strengthening inspection, targeting, and enforcement capabilities at land ports of entry (LPOEs). The investment will support the acquisition and deployment of additional non-intrusive inspection (NII) technology, expanded targeting and analytical capabilities, modernized port infrastructure, and increased staffing for frontline inspection and enforcement operations. These resources will improve OFO's ability to detect and interdict narcotics, illicit currency, firearms, contraband, and other prohibited goods; identify individuals who may pose security risks; and address evolving transnational criminal threats. By improving screening efficiency and operational capacity at POEs, OFO will be better positioned to facilitate lawful trade and travel

while enhancing border security and supporting coordinated enforcement efforts with domestic and international partners along the U.S.-Canada border.

WFTCA funding will also strengthen USBP's ability to secure the Northern Border by expanding personnel, technology, mobility, and infrastructure in areas that present unique operational challenges. The investment will support the hiring, training, and deployment of additional Border Patrol Agents and support staff; enhance domain awareness through advanced surveillance systems, sensors, cameras, and unmanned aircraft; improve communications and operational mobility in remote and rugged environments; and provide resources for facilities, vehicles, and other mission-support requirements. These enhancements will help Border Patrol detect, identify, and respond to unlawful cross-border activity more effectively, including narcotics smuggling, human trafficking, transnational criminal activity, and other threats, while facilitating coordination with federal, state, local, tribal, and international law enforcement partners along the nearly 5,500-mile U.S.-Canada border.

Finally, WFTCA funding will bolster AMO's ability to fortify the Northern Border by enhancing aerial and maritime surveillance, interdiction, and rapid-response capabilities. These investments will support additional personnel, aircraft, vessels, and operational technology, enabling AMO to expand domain awareness and increase support to USBP, OFO, and law enforcement partners. Enhanced air and maritime capabilities will improve the detection and interdiction of narcotics trafficking, human smuggling, and other transnational criminal activity across the vast and diverse Northern Border environment.

Northern Border Technology Deployment

OFO extensively utilizes NII technology along the Northern Border to enhance security and facilitate lawful trade at POEs. These advanced systems, including X-ray and gamma-ray imaging, allow officers to "see" inside conveyances such as passenger vehicles, commercial trucks, and railcars without physically opening them. This capability enables the rapid detection of anomalies that may indicate illicit narcotics, contraband, or other threats, significantly improving efficiency and safety for both officers and the traveling public. The deployment of NII systems minimizes delays for legitimate trade and travel, ensuring that critical economic activities are not unduly hampered. This technological investment is vital for maintaining a secure border while supporting the substantial flow of goods and people that characterize the U.S.-Canada relationship. By leveraging NII technology, CBP can conduct thorough inspections quickly, interdict suspected dangerous materials and maintain the critical flow of lawful goods and travelers across the border.

USBP is significantly enhancing Northern Border security through a technology-driven approach known as Autonomous Persistent Surveillance (APS), which combines Artificial Intelligence (AI), sensors, and communications to provide continuous situational awareness and support Border Patrol Agents. This includes the deployment of AI-driven Autonomous Surveillance Towers, with a target of 550 new and retrofitted towers designed to automatically distinguish real incursions from environmental movement in real time. Complementing these are 134 Autonomous Mobile Surveillance Systems, 17 of which are deployed on the Northern Border, alongside 871 miles of Linear Ground Detection Systems, with 100 miles specifically on the Northern Border. Further technological advancements include 30 miles of Cross Border Tunnel

Threat detection, 2 Mobile Detection Tunnel Toolkits, and over 21,000 new LTE-enabled Land Mobile Radios, with 1,900 allocated to the Northern Border. This shift from reactive to proactive operations means automated detection and identification free agents from constant manual monitoring, allowing them to focus on targeted interdiction and apprehension. Central to this strategy is Domain Awareness, achieved through the Operational Picture for Tactical Intelligence and Control (OPTIC) platform. OPTIC is a cloud-based system that unifies sensor data and analytics, provides a near-real-time Common Operating Picture, and delivers data fusion, automated decision support, and autonomous sensor command-and-control with operator override. This human-led, technology-enabled approach ensures that while AI and autonomous systems identify and characterize threats, trained Border Patrol agents retain final decision-making authority, leveraging enhanced, timely, and actionable intelligence as a force multiplier.

Key Enforcement Operations and Trends

While often overshadowed by activity along the Southwest Border, the Northern Border presents its own unique challenges. CBP employs targeted enforcement operations and continuously monitors trends to adapt its strategies.

OFO Operational Trends and Enforcement Activity

In Fiscal Year 2025, OFO upheld its mission to safeguard America by enforcing border security, customs, and immigration laws across the Northern Border. Leveraging advanced technology, intelligence-driven strategies, and the expertise of its personnel, OFO officers processed over 56 million travelers and nearly 25 million conveyances, ensuring both the enforcement of lawful trade and travel and maintaining comprehensive security. OFO's effective operations led to the seizure of 10,853 pounds of narcotics along the Northern Border in FY 2025, representing a significant 51% increase from the 7,176 pounds intercepted in FY 2024.

- **Flagpoling:** Unlike the Southwest Border, Northern Border enforcement encounters mainly occur at POEs versus between POEs. The Northern Border saw declines in enforcement encounters following a January 2025 Executive Order; however, this decline is also likely attributed to the Government of Canada implementing restrictive immigration policies—most notably changes in rules for “flagpoling” in December 2024. Flagpoling occurs when foreign nationals who hold temporary resident status in Canada, leave Canada and, after a visit to the United States or St. Pierre and Miquelon, re-enter to access immigration services at a Canadian POE. CBP notes a sharp decrease in individuals flagpoling at Northern Border POEs; however, flagpoling flows remain as there are exceptions in the policy, allowing for truck drivers and certain professionals/technicians covered under trade agreements.
- **Operation Motor City:** In June 2025, Operation Motor City was a targeted enforcement operation within the Detroit Field Office aimed at disrupting narcotics and illicit contraband smuggling through specific POEs. Data collected, including information from Confidential Human Source handlers, was shared with the Port Intelligence and Analytical Unit and the Field Intelligence and Analytical Unit to develop additional targets and analyze violators. An Evidence Collection Team was utilized to lift latent prints from conveyances, compartments, narcotics packaging, and illicit contraband. Operation Motor City culminated in 9 seizures totaling 341.94 lbs. of cocaine and federal prosecution of the Indian national driver, \$153,491 USD in undeclared currency, 58,202

lbs. of loose tobacco, and the seizure of jewelry after U.S. Fish & Wildlife verified its origin from elephant ivory.

- **Operation Northern Lights:** Developed in response to significant narcotics seizures by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) north of the Sweetgrass, Montana POE, Operation Northern Lights (ONL) was conducted in September 2025. This operation targeted narcotics and illicit contraband smuggling northbound to Canada. Intelligence gathered during ONL led to an inbound seizure of stolen and misappropriated Native American artifacts and a subsequent criminal investigation. ONL demonstrated OFO's ability to apply enforcement actions in critical areas, even where low staffing typically restricts such attention without high financial cost.
- **U.S. Citizen Wanted for Felony Child Abuse:** On April 29, 2026, CBP officers encountered a 48-year-old male United States citizen returning from Canada and operating a vehicle registered in Pennsylvania. During the inspection, CBP officers discovered a National Crime Information Center match indicating he had an active arrest warrant for assaulting a child. CBP officers escorted the man to a secondary inspection area and confirmed that the arrest warrant issued by the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office remained active and verified that he was the subject of that warrant.

USBP Operational Trends and Enforcement Activity

In Fiscal Year 2025, USBP Northern Border apprehensions declined to 7,829 after reaching record levels in Fiscal Year 2023 (10,021) and Fiscal Year 2024 (23,718), with aliens entering between the POEs from Canada. These historic flows were largely driven by apprehensions of Indian and Mexican nationals who abused Canada's lenient visa policies. Following Canada's reinstatement of visa requirements for Mexican nationals and changes to their visa policies for Indian nationals, USBP began seeing decreases in apprehensions in the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2025. Additionally, in Fiscal Year 2024, USBP seized 4,400 pounds of narcotics, including 4,012 pounds of marijuana, 127 pounds of methamphetamine, 90 pounds of ecstasy, 32 pounds of fentanyl, and 21 pounds of cocaine, along the Northern Border. This number increased to 5,700 pounds in Fiscal Year 2025—an increase of over 29 percent—including 3,440 pounds of marijuana, 113 pounds of cocaine, 100 pounds of methamphetamine, 76 pounds of fentanyl, and 1 pound of ecstasy.

- **Apprehension of Tren de Aragua Member:** On July 28, 2025, U.S. Border Patrol agents arrested an illegal alien from Venezuela who is a member of the Tren de Aragua gang during a traffic stop in the metro Detroit area. Marysville Station agents responded to a request from law enforcement partners in Shelby Township, who had stopped a vehicle displaying a fraudulent license plate. The vehicle was occupied by three Venezuelan nationals. Record checks conducted by Border Patrol agents revealed all three individuals were illegally present in the United States. One of the individuals was identified as a member of Tren de Aragua, a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. Additional record checks of the 30-year-old male Tren de Aragua member revealed multiple charges since 2023, including weapons violations, immigration violations, and violent robbery.
- **Apprehension of Venezuelan Man wanted for Homicide:** On July 7, 2025, U.S. Border Patrol agents arrested a Venezuelan illegal alien wanted for homicide in his home country. Agents from the Gibraltar Station responded to a request for assistance, Wednesday from law enforcement partners in Lincoln Park, Michigan, who had stopped a

man driving without a license. Record checks revealed the individual to be Franh Enrique Yonkaiker Machado-Rivas, 27, who is wanted in connection with a homicide investigation in Venezuela. Machado-Rivas admitted to agents that he was in the U.S. illegally.

Executive Actions to Enhance Northern Border Security

With the support of recent Presidential directives, CBP is working with DHS, the Department of Justice, and the Department of State partners to enhance Northern Border security. This includes modernizing technology, streamlining operations, and improving interagency coordination.

- **Securing our Borders:** Executive Order 14165 increases personnel, deploys advanced technology, and upgrades infrastructure to combat illegal crossings, human trafficking, and contraband smuggling.
- **Strengthening Customs Enforcement:** Executive Order 14411 targets forced labor and unfair trade practices, expands Withhold Release Orders (WROs), and boosts international coordination.
- **Protecting the American People Against Invasion:** Executive Order 14159 establishes an interagency task force to disrupt smuggling networks through intelligence sharing and community engagement.
- **Amendment to Duties to Address the Flow of Illicit Drugs Across Our Northern Border:** Executive Order 14325 invests in advanced surveillance, biometric systems, and port upgrades to ensure secure and efficient trade and travel.
- **Suspending Duty-Free Minimis Treatment for All Countries:** President Trump's July 30, 2025, Executive Order 14324, suspending the de minimis exemption empowers CBP to better detect and block high-risk shipments, strengthening efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking and protect national security. This requires duties on low-value imports to prevent customs evasion and illicit goods entry.

Intelligence and Coordination on the Northern Border

CBP employs sophisticated intelligence and coordination mechanisms to enhance security and operational effectiveness along the Northern Border. These efforts are critical for understanding and countering evolving threats.

Currently, CBP operates the Northern Border Coordination Center (NBCC), a forward-deployed, centralized coordination center for USBP. Located at Selfridge Air National Guard Base (ANGB) near Detroit, Michigan, the NBCC serves as a vital hub for information sharing, intelligence, training, domain awareness, and stakeholder engagement. It collaborates with federal, state, tribal, local, and international government partners across the entire northern border of the United States. The NBCC provides a wide range of services for Sector Intelligence Units, including law enforcement intelligence system administration and training, analytical support, and digital forensic and Document and Media Exploitation support. It also produces regional-level strategic threat and intelligence assessments, focusing primarily on counterterrorism and transnational organized crime activities. Furthermore, the NBCC maintains expertise on northern border threats between the POEs and exploits all-source classified information and intelligence to counter these threats.

Building upon these capabilities, CBP's Office of Intelligence (OI) is coordinating with OFO in Detroit and the USBP Detroit Sector, with support from AMO, to establish the Northern Border Intelligence Center (NBIC). This fusion center, like the Southern Border Intelligence Center in Tucson, Arizona, will integrate intelligence from across the Northern Border, spanning from Washington to Maine. The NBIC will incorporate intelligence from all CBP components—OI, OFO, USBP, and AMO—as well as federal, state, and local partners. This initiative will adopt a multi-campus approach, initially locating assets and personnel at Selfridge ANGB, with vital integration pieces involving partners in Detroit, Michigan. The Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations bill provided \$3 million for the establishment of the NBIC, which CBP is utilizing to construct a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility at Selfridge ANGB, serving as the starting point for this critical intelligence hub.

Additionally, CBP is actively engaged within the Homeland Security Task Force (HSTF) with the understanding that the integration of all law enforcement components is essential to defeat transnational criminal or foreign terrorist organization (TCO/FTO) activity. Similarly, CBP is engaged within the National Coordination Center (NCC) recognizing the value in deconfliction and synchronization of enforcement and investigative efforts across the Northern Border and beyond. This integrated approach is essential to the continued facilitation of lawful trade and travel while simultaneously advancing our national and economic security.

Collaborative Engagement with Stakeholders

Collaboration is the foundation of effective border management, especially on the Northern Border.

Joint Operations with Canada

Working in partnership with our Canadian counterparts has long been a cornerstone of CBP's Northern Border strategy. In Fiscal Year 2025, USBP conducted 31 joint operations with Canadian law enforcement agencies, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the CBSA. These operations included a wide range of activities, from mirrored patrols on land and water to intelligence-sharing initiatives and bi-national maritime enforcement efforts. By leveraging the expertise and resources of both nations, we can address shared threats more effectively. One promising initiative is the Integrated Cross-Border Maritime Law Enforcement Operations program, commonly known as Shiprider. This program allows U.S. and Canadian law enforcement officers to operate jointly in each other's territorial waters, enhancing our ability to pursue and interdict threats. Cross-border enforcement actions conducted under this program have led to the seizure of firearms, narcotics, and other dangerous contraband. OFO continuously engages with the CBSA, fostering a strong partnership that facilitates coordinated border operations and close collaboration on operational details surrounding changes to port hours, ensuring seamless communication and minimizing disruptions. This ongoing coordination is crucial for optimizing resource allocation and maintaining consistent service levels across the shared border. By aligning operational hours, both agencies can more effectively manage traffic flows and enhance security bilaterally. This collaborative approach ensures that resources are strategically deployed, allowing both countries to address shared threats more efficiently and coordinate efforts in areas such as returning inadmissible aliens. Ultimately, this close partnership supports both national security objectives and the economic prosperity driven by legitimate cross-border commerce and tourism.

OFO also participated in the inaugural Northern Land Border Binational Infrastructure Forum on October 30, 2024, in Washington, DC, led by the Office of Facilities and Asset Management (OFAM). OFO provided mid-year comments for the Spring 2025 check-in between the OFAM Assistant Commissioner and the CBSA Vice President. Under the IIJA, OFO is working with OFAM to finalize plans with CBSA for land preclearance operations at Alcan, Alaska. This initiative enhances binational security presence, enables efficient use of infrastructure funding by both nations, aligns with an increased collaborative vision for LPOEs, and enhances border and law enforcement presence in a remote location.

Domestic Stakeholder Engagement

Beyond our international partners, CBP actively works with local stakeholders and communities. This engagement ensures consistent communication is maintained and feedback is received. This collaborative approach allows CBP to adapt its operations to local needs while upholding national security and travel and trade facilitation objectives. CBP's communication presence across Northern Border communities is enhanced through clear, consistent, and accessible public outreach. This increases public understanding of CBP's border security mission and how Northern Border communities play a direct role in supporting national safety measures. We empower residents to act as force multipliers by encouraging responsible reporting of suspicious activity and emphasizing how local vigilance helps deter criminal operations before they reach interior communities. CBP already receives valuable intelligence from public reporting, which has been critical in stopping smuggling and drug trafficking along the Northern Border. Border security is strongest when CBP and communities work side by side. Tribal nations, local governments, and residents are trusted partners in safeguarding the Northern Border.

Challenges and Needs

While significant progress has been made, CBP continues to pursue opportunities to strengthen the security of our Northern Border. First, continued collaboration with Canadian authorities is critical. By expanding joint operations, enhancing intelligence-sharing capabilities, and fostering deeper integration of resources, we can more effectively address the shared threats that impact both nations. Second, investments in technology, such as NII and APS, are vital to improving our ability to monitor and secure remote areas of the border. These technologies will allow us to detect and track illicit activity in areas that are currently difficult to monitor due to terrain or resource limitations. Third, increased resources – including additional Border Patrol agents – are necessary to maintain a robust presence at key locations, including international railroad bridges, marinas, and the Great Lakes region.

Conclusion

In closing, CBP's operations on the Northern Border are characterized by a commitment to security, efficiency, and collaboration. Our extensive network of POEs and areas between them, coupled with strategic resource management, robust intelligence capabilities, and strong partnerships, enables effective management of this critical region. We continuously evaluate our operations, making data-driven decisions to optimize resource allocation and ensure the seamless flow of legitimate trade and travel, all while properly safeguarding our homeland.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.