

Written Testimony-Chris T. Clem 5/10/24

House Judiciary Committee

Good morning Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Chris Clem and I am a retired Chief Patrol Agent of the US Border Patrol. I began my career in 1995 about 150 miles east of here in Lordsburg, NM as a GS-5 Border Patrol Trainee and retired nearly 17 months ago about 250 miles west of here as the Senior Executive Service Chief Patrol Agent in Yuma, AZ. Therefore, my responses to your questions will be based on my best recollection of my experiences over the last now 28 plus years.

I spent most of my career along the Southwest Border, where I was a canine handler, collateral duty intelligence officer, firearms instructor, and I spent a few years in Washington, DC and New Orleans, LA. I was career government employee who served under five Presidential Administrations starting under Clinton and ending under Biden. I was not a political appointee. I promoted through the ranks through the competitive process and commanded four border patrol stations across New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. I served as the Deputy Chief Patrol Agent in New Orleans Sector, El Paso Sector, Acting Chief in Big Bend, Texas Sector for nearly six months before being promoted to the Chief Patrol Agent of the Yuma, AZ Sector for two years until retirement. I spent time as an agent in remote locations as well as urban environments, and I can tell you if you have been to one station you have been to one station, if you have been to one sector you have been to one sector. Each location is different with its own set of unique circumstances from terrain to infrastructure, to communities and to threats. However, the one thing that is consistent across the spectrum, without border security, our agents, our community, the migrants, and our country are vulnerable. While immigration and border security are closely related, they are not mutually exclusive. However, without proper border security, in the form of physical security, border patrol agents, strong policies and consequences, the integrity of the immigration system is compromised and the founding principles surrounding the rule of law suffer. My statement and testimony today will be focused on Border Security to which I would be considered a subject matter expert, immigration as mentioned is related, but can only be effective and efficient when the border is secured.

It is also my testimony that each administration that I served under made efforts to secure our border based on requirements of the border patrol agents, except the Biden Administration. Under President Clinton a hiring push began for more agents, I was one of them. Under President Bush and as a result of the tragedy of September 11, 2001, infrastructure plans and one of the first National Border Patrol Strategies were implemented. Even under President Obama, there were hundreds of miles of border wall constructed, especially early in his terms. We also know that "build a wall" was a fixture of the Candidate Trump campaign but became a reality under President Trump. Let me be clear, President Trump implemented requirements which were a culmination of decades of experience from border patrol agents, the wall was much more than a wall it was a system to include wall, technology, access roads and even strong policies to close loopholes. I will state that the system in place in 2020 was one of the best we could have asked for as a country even with party politics and funding making things difficult. This ended and came to a screeching halt under Biden. This committee and Congress have access to all the available data, and the

staunch difference between the previous administration and the current is gut wrenching and jaw dropping. I understand not every threat to our great nation will come directly across the border, but why would we be willing to even risk it? We know there are countless gaps and vulnerabilities created along the border, specifically the southern border. We are on the heels of two recent testimonies from FBI Director Wray that indicate the threats are real. With hot spots around the world that have happened under President Biden's Administration, there are more than enough reasons to secure our border and put back in the place the plan as intended to include infrastructure, technology, and policies. We need the wall installed and completed where it makes sense, we need the technology installed as intended and we need to increase the number of border patrol agents and border security personnel as requested by senior field leaders. It is also my opinion that a border security bill should be submitted as a stand-alone bill. This bill should be based on the needs of Border Patrol Field Chiefs as required by their agents to complete their security mission. Immigration and Customs Enforcement investigations and detention agencies should also be included in this package. It is when this bill is signed into law then and only then should a separate immigration system overhaul begin. This will allow border security solutions to stand on the principle of American security and minimize the trade-offs over outside interests for immigration reforms. A standalone border security bill that addresses the obligation of the government to protect its borders and people will not only make us safer, but it will also give a much needed boost to the border patrol agents who have had to be put in the middle of this nightmare with little support and advocacy from the White House.

Lastly, I want to thank you for holding a field hearing. I have been advocating for more field hearings so "We the People" can meet you and feel represented. While it is difficult to pull off, it is essential for Americans to be truly represented. I understand many will claim this is a political stunt, I would counter by stating, talking about the hearing, and not acting on behalf of the communities so greatly impacted by this border crisis is the political stunt. I am grateful for your willingness to come to the border again to hear from those that have lived it and are living it today. I look forward to your questions.