

The Honorable John Carter
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security

Opening Statement:

Witnesses:
Deputy Director Ragsdale
Executive Associate Director Homan
Deputy Executive Associate Director Edge

10:00 AM | Thursday | March 13, 2014 | 2362-A RHOB

Hearing is called to order –

I'm pleased to welcome our panel this morning, which is made up of three exceptional professionals who have almost 75 years of law enforcement experience between them:

- Dan Ragsdale, ICE's Acting Director;
- Tom Homan, Executive Associate Director, Enforcement and Removal Operations; and
- Pete Edge, Deputy Executive Associate Director, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Before we begin, I want to thank you and all of your agents, officers, and investigative teams for your service. This subcommittee knows your efforts are essential to keep our nation safe, and we are grateful.

Our job today is to learn whether the President's budget request enables you to do your jobs taking down transnational criminal organizations, combating illegal cross border activity, and enforcing immigration laws.

Gentlemen, I'm going to be blunt. As Chairman of this subcommittee, I must be convinced the budget supports your operations. Unfortunately, from what I have reviewed so far, cuts to operational accounts aren't justified by facts, analysis, or data.

For example, I'm not convinced the detention bed request is sufficient to detain Level 1, 2, and 3 criminals, fugitives, and criminal aliens being released from prison.

I'm worried the cut to HSI salaries means fewer investigative hours, and continued imbalance between the need for special agents and a team of wire-tap specialists, intel analysts, and assistants.

It upsets me that politically motivated policies and directives are creating an invitational posture at the border... and that this open invitation causes human suffering and law enforcement nightmares. I get even more irritated when those policies and directives undermine legitimate budgetary needs. Bottom line -- ICE is not an organization that should be politicized. Its law enforcement mission is just too important.

Here are some cold, hard facts. From October through December, the Border Patrol apprehended 66,928 people in the Rio Grande Valley, a place we Texans call “the Valley.” Of the total, 49,815 were “Other-Than-Mexicans” and 18,555 were juveniles.

When these folks were apprehended, they met ICE’s mandatory detention criteria because they were “recent illegal entrants” but, needless to say, they weren’t all placed in detention beds.

What I’d like for you to provide for the record, is what happened to them once they were processed by CBP and turned over to ICE.

- Of the 66,928 people, how many were actually placed in detention? What happened to the people ICE didn’t detain?
- How many were removed, remain in detention, were placed in alternatives to detention, or claimed credible fear and are waiting for immigration hearings?
- Of the 18,555 children, how many were delivered to family members living legally or illegally in the United States, and how many children continue to wait in shelters because they couldn’t be reunited with family members?

With statistics like this, it is hard to believe the President’s budget supports ICE’s operational requirements. I’m concerned that CBP and ICE are stretched beyond their capacity. Public safety is at risk. We can only hope that criminals and terrorists – who are most certainly exploiting the gaps – won’t be successful in their unlawful and treacherous endeavors.

Gentlemen, all too often this debate ends up focusing on stories of good, hard-working people who make this dangerous journey to take care of their families. But what do we know about the criminal organizations that brought these migrants into the United States? What other illegal activity do they conduct? How are they networked inside our borders? Is the human trafficking business providing the capital they need to develop cyber pornography, sell drugs, or sell the very kids they’re transporting? These are the criminals ICE goes after...this is the evil ICE confronts...and you deserve a robust budget to do it effectively.

In closing, I know you mean well. But I’d be irresponsible if I didn’t ask whether the very policies and directives creating this massive migration of people are contributing to an environment that supports criminal activity. This is my biggest frustration and constant worry.

Gentlemen, we have a common goal – to keep the homeland as safe as possible. We are counting on you to give us the facts and the benefit of your professional judgment.

Before we get to your testimony, however, I’ll turn the floor over to my distinguished colleague from North Carolina and the subcommittee’s ranking member, Mr. Price.

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