

The Honorable John Carter
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
FY 2015 U.S. Customs and Border Protection Budget Request

Witness:

Commissioner Gil Kerlikowske
10:00 AM | Wednesday | April 2, 2014 | 2358-A RHOB
Opening Statement As Prepared

Hearing is called to order –

Today we welcome the recently confirmed Commissioner for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in what marks his very first appearance before our Subcommittee. Commissioner Kerlikowske, welcome....we appreciate you being here and thank you for your willingness to serve DHS and our Nation.

When we met, you said you requested this assignment because the job would draw on your experience as both a career police officer and in counter-narcotics. There is no question...your law enforcement background will be invaluable to CBP. You can count on this subcommittee to deliver the funding and tough oversight that CBP needs to fulfill its critical mission – a mission which captures what DHS is all about – facilitating legitimate travel and trade *into* the country and securing our Nation’s borders and keeping any and all threats *out* of our country.

CBP’s budget of nearly \$13 billion dollars is almost 40% of DHS’s total budget request. During today’s hearing, we’ll ask whether your front line operators – the CBP officers, Border Patrol agents, and Air and Marine interdiction agents – have what they need to get the job done.

For the Office of Field Operations, we’ll explore whether CBP has everything they need to efficiently process the more than 110 million international travelers expected this year and over \$2.38 trillion worth of goods that cross our borders annually.

Finally, Commissioner, we need to discuss the human tragedy unfolding down south. As you know, the number of children crossing the border illegally without parents or guardians is skyrocketing. About 6,000 crossed in 2011, 34,000 crossed last year, and CBP projects 60,000 to cross in FY14 – that’s a ten-fold increase in the past three years.

Regrettably, this serious issue is devolving into a humanitarian crisis and a law enforcement nightmare. We need to discuss what’s causing the problem, the roles and responsibilities of CBP and HHS, and the resource implications of this influx of smuggled and trafficked children.

While I recognize and am sympathetic to the humanitarian obligations we give these young victims, we cannot ignore that policies are creating a gravitational pull so strong that parents are willing to support vile criminal networks, and to place their precious children in harm’s way—outcomes this subcommittee cannot accept.

During this hearing, I intend to get to the bottom of this issue...because it is tale of human tragedy that cannot be ignored.

Commissioner, sovereign nations control and manage their borders and sustain the integrity of their immigration systems. These objectives are your duty and I expect nothing less from you, and from the men and women of CBP.

Now, let me turn to our Distinguished Ranking Member and former Chairman for any remarks he wishes to make.

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