



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

FY 17 Budget Hearing – U.S. Customs & Border Protection March 1, 2016 Opening Statement As Prepared

Thank you for yielding, Mr. Chairman. Commissioner Kerlikowske, thank you for being here today to discuss your Fiscal Year 2017 budget request for Customs and Border Protection. I immensely enjoyed our timing working together when you served as the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, or the Drug Czar. In that role, you graciously took the time to visit my Appalachian district to learn more about our challenges with prescription drug abuse, and you therefore bring a unique perspective to your new position at CBP. As the prescription drug epidemic has exploded onto the national scene, giving way to heroin abuse, controlling the influx of this dangerous drug – and the violence that it fuels in our border communities and elsewhere – should be a top priority. I look forward to hearing about CBP's efforts to reduce the supply of opioids in our country.

With over 60,000 employees, CBP is one of the world's largest law enforcement agencies. You are tasked with protecting the United States through a number of critical missions, including preventing the illegal entry of terrorists, weapons, and narcotics from the air, sea, and land. On a typical day, CBP welcomes nearly 1 million visitors, screens more than 67,000 cargo containers, arrests more than 1,100 individuals and seizes nearly 6 tons of illicit drugs. You are busy to say the least, and before delving into the merits of the request, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the men and women under your charge who serve our great nation – many of whom put themselves in harm's way on a daily basis to keep our homeland safe.

The Fiscal Year 2017 budget request for your Agency is \$13.941 billion, which constitutes an increase of \$687 million above last year's enacted level. I would like to commend you on the improvements you have made to the Visa Security Program, although I do have some concerns with the gaps that still remain. I also look forward to the expansion of the preclearance program, which will push our borders further and further out.

While there are many positive things in this budget submission, I am deeply disappointed by the efforts to ratchet down border security and enforcement of our immigration laws. For example, the budget proposes a reduction of 300 Border Patrol Agents, decreasing the statutory floor to 21,070, at a time when drug cartels from Mexico and elsewhere are flooding our communities – urban and rural alike – with heroin. Others in the Administration have rightfully labeled the abuse of opioids as a national epidemic, with roughly 100 Americans losing their battle to addiction every day – and yet you have proposed to reduce our first line of defense against the entry of these dangerous, deadly drugs without the benefit of any supporting analysis that Border Patrol's mission won't be compromised. As I mentioned, Mr. Commissioner, you've been to my district and have seen firsthand how these drugs are destroying rural communities in Appalachia. While you and I agree that reducing demand through treatment and education is critical, we must not lose sight of the fact that enforcement remains a critical prong of our holistic strategy.

The stakes are high, and we must do everything in our power to combat this scourge. I look forward to continuing to work with you to provide you the resources to do just that.

Another crisis that is being caused by the drug cartels is the massive influx of unaccompanied alien children and families at our southern border. We've seen a surge in drug cartel and gang violence across Central and South America. Fueled by the production and trafficking of drugs, these thugs and murderers are wreaking havoc on millions of people, forcing many to flee to other countries including the United States. Recently, there has been an unprecedented spike in unaccompanied minors crossing our southern border. In the first 4 months of Fiscal Year 2016, the U.S. Border Patrol has apprehended 20,000 unaccompanied alien children. That's double the number that were apprehend in the same timeframe last year. Unfortunately, this humanitarian crisis does not appear to be subsiding anytime soon, the reality of which is reflected in your budget submission. You have requested resources to support a revised baseline of 75,000 unaccompanied child apprehensions, as well as a contingency fund should that number be exceeded. Our committee will analyze this request and my hope is that we can provide the necessary resources for CBP to handle the influx of these children at our borders.

In addition, virtually half of the 5.2% increase in your budget comes from the transfer of \$305 million for the Office of Biometric Identity Management which, as you know, like fees, requires authorization from other committees. Unfortunately, the President has sent us budget after budget that requests large increases in funding and offsets them by using budget gimmicks like increasing taxes and fees that he knows are dead on arrival in Congress.

Finally, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention President Obama's executive order on immigration. As you know, this still remains one of the most divisive issues in Congress and this country. The President's unilateral action demonstrates he has no intention of working with Congress or respecting our Constitutional authority. Unfortunately, you and your agency are caught in the middle of this fight and it has made passing an annual appropriations bill for the Department of Homeland Security incredible difficult. It also makes it impossible to move forward on any meaningful immigration reforms while the President remains in office.

Thank you again for being here today, Commissioner Kerlikowske. I look forward to your testimony.

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