

Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Rep. Burgess Testimony
4/9/19

Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, Ranking Member Fleischmann, and members of the subcommittee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security. As a representative from the border state of Texas, I believe I can provide unique insight into the situation on our southern border and the challenges facing our Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers.

According to CBP, in February 2019, the 76,000 apprehensions and persons found to be inadmissible on our southern border was the highest level in 12 years and an increase of 107% over the same period last year. While many migrants come seeking a better life or freedom from persecution, we cannot ignore the fact that our porous border also encourages the transportation of illegal drugs, violent criminals, and human trafficking into the United States.

Illegal drugs coming across our southern border end up in the hands of those struggling with addiction, fueling the opioid epidemic that is killing 130 Americans each day. Last Congress, the Energy and Commerce Committee originated the Substance Use-Disorder Prevention that

Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities Act, which is the most comprehensive legislation to combat opioid abuse in our nation's history. This bill became law on October 24, 2018. But the tools and programs authorized by this bill will not dent the supply of addictive opioids if fentanyl and carfentanil continue to cross our border. Just three months ago, CBP officers seized the largest amount of fentanyl in history; nearly 254 pounds totaling \$3.5 million in value. A lethal dose of fentanyl is only 2 milligrams. In comparison, a lethal dose of morphine is 200 milligrams. The recent CBP seizure could have killed 100 million people. Our efforts to combat opioid use cannot compete with the current supply. The only way to significantly reduce opioid deaths is to stop the drugs from crossing our border in the first place.

Another concern is the number of women and children that are trafficked across our border. Traffickers, and even legitimate adults seeking asylum, know that it is easier to remain in the United States if you enter with a child. Smugglers are encouraging migrants to cross now in case President Trump's border wall does get built, and they are collecting a sizeable fee for facilitating the journey. Last year, I traveled to the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras where I learned that many families will sell off or leverage their homes in order to

pay the between \$6,000 - \$10,000 fee for smugglers. Some take a loan from a legitimate bank to finance the journey and pay it back using remittances from a relative or contact that is in the United States illegally. People in Central America pay attention to our words and our actions. It is well-known that our CBP and ICE officers are bound by immigration laws that can be easily exploited. This is one of the catalysts for the migrant caravans consisting of hundreds of people that march to our border demanding entry. To stop the flow of undocumented immigrants into our country we must act on President Trump's promises to secure our southern border.

While Congress contemplates these authorities, we must continue to support our brave men and women working to keep our country safe. When CBP apprehends an unaccompanied alien child, they must transfer the child to the care of the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within 72 hours. When this crisis began in 2014, ORR was not equipped to deal with the influx of children and their unique needs. Through the work of the Energy and Commerce Committee we have improved standards of care, including screenings for physical and mental health, physical and sexual abuse, and gang membership. Nearly all children are placed with fully-vetted family members, family friends or a

non-relative sponsor. While awaiting placement, these children are housed in facilities with classrooms, game rooms, and soccer fields. They have movie nights, pizza parties, and field trips, and even elect class officers as part of their education. The stories of children held in cages are left over from 2014 when the influx overwhelmed CBP and ICE capacity. I have visited numerous of these facilities over the years, including very recently, and can attest first-hand to the improved conditions.

I am proud of the progress we have made to advance care through ORR. But the first few hours or days in our country for most migrants, including unaccompanied alien children, is in an overcrowded and under resourced CBP facility or ICE detention center.

CBP and ICE officers are not typically trained to provide medical care, mental health counseling, or other services that are badly needed by recently arrived migrants. Yet, these agencies find themselves overwhelmed, with nowhere to put the migrants and few available to care for them. President Trump's budget requests \$192 million to hire 750 Border Patrol agents and 171 CBP officers and invests \$367 million for CBP technology and equipment. In addition, the budget requests \$314 million for 1,000 ICE officers and 128 immigration court prosecuting attorneys, and \$2.7 billion for 54,000 detention beds. Last, President Trump requests

\$5 billion for new border wall in locations identified by the Border Patrol as necessary to obtain operational control of the border and impede the flow of illegal crossings, and \$367 million for aircraft, vessels, and technology and equipment to support the interdiction of undocumented immigrants, illegal drugs, and human trafficking operations.

The situation on our southern border cannot be ignored. We must allow our agents and officers to enforce our laws and protect our country. I ask that you provide the full FY2020 budget requested by the President. This will give adequate tools and resources to our CBP and ICE officers and reduce the flow of undocumented immigrants, and some criminals, by allowing construction of new border wall. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I am available to follow-up with this subcommittee on any of my remarks.