

**House Committee on Appropriations, Department of Homeland Security
Subcommittee Member Day
Congresswoman Xochitl Torres Small
February 26, 2020**

Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, Ranking Member Fleischmann, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on my district's appropriations homeland security priorities for fiscal year 2021.

I am grateful for the Subcommittee's work last year to secure funding for issues important to my district like border security technology, construction and improvements at FLETC Artesia, increased CBP officers, and the hiring of the first class of Border Patrol Processing Coordinators.

As we look ahead to fiscal year 2021, I would like to discuss four areas within CBP that are integral to an efficient and safe border security system and therefore merit your attention: a recruitment and retention strategy to improve hiring at CBP, the hiring of Border Patrol processing coordinators, increased investments in our ports of entry, and increased scanning of vehicles entering the country with non-intrusive inspection technology.

As you may know, CBP has a large footprint in my district. We have three ports of entry, and six Border Patrol stations, which employ dozens of hard-working CBP New Mexicans.

However, as a native of southern New Mexico, I know full well the challenges that CBP faces in attracting and retaining qualified personnel, particularly in remote areas where an

employee's spouse may have trouble finding a job, and children must travel far to attend school. Further, being a CBP Officer or Border Patrol Agent is a demanding job that requires an extraordinary amount of dedication. Agents and officers often work long hours, and sometimes in inhospitable conditions.

Therefore, it is essential that CBP has the necessary resources to recruit and retain its personnel, which includes financial and work-mobility incentives as well as a strategy and implementation plan focused on improving the hiring and retention of individuals, particularly in rural or remote areas.

One way to efficiently and better staff Border Patrol is through the hiring of processing coordinators. Unfortunately, last year our broken border security and immigration system was pushed far beyond its limits, leaving many Border Patrol agents to take on work they weren't trained to carry out.

Processing coordinators receive tailored training to conduct non-law enforcement duties such as processing and transporting individuals in custody, which improves detention oversight and humanitarian care, and allows traditional agents return to the field to focus on law-enforcement duties at the border.

Last year, you included funding for the first class of processing coordinators, and I urge you to continue funding this position in fiscal year 2021 to ensure our Border Patrol agents can remain in the field securing the border.

Just as important as ensuring Border Patrol has the necessary resources to be successful, is making sure the Office of Field Operations (OFO) and its ports of entry are properly funded.

Last year in my district, the Santa Teresa Port of Entry experienced a 17.4 percent increase in total trade, totaling \$30.5 billion in exported and imported goods.¹ This increase rocketed the port to fourth in total trade for all land ports of entry on the U.S.-Mexico border, and sixth in total trade for all land ports of entry in the country.²

Santa Teresa's growth is especially remarkable given that it was, and continues to be, understaffed. According to CBP El Paso Field Operations leadership, the OFO workload staffing model projects the total number of officers at the port should be considerably higher than its current levels.³ This is even more significant when you consider the current OFO workload staffing model was calculated before Santa Teresa was facilitating trade at its current levels.

Furthermore, outdated infrastructure at Santa Teresa is holding back the port from realizing its full potential. At a recent House Homeland Security Subcommittee hearing at the Santa Teresa Port of Entry, the Subcommittee learned from CBP leadership and local stakeholders that although the port is growing, it is hampered by infrastructure constraints, which impede the expansion of traffic volumes.⁴

¹ U.S. Census Bureau: Economic Indicators Division USA Trade Online. U.S. Import and Export Merchandise trade statistics. <https://usatrade.census.gov/>.

² Ibid.

³ Testimony of Hector Mancha, El Paso Director of Field Operations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, for a hearing titled "*Promoting Safe and Efficient Travel and Trade at America's Land Ports of Entry*" before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability. December 2, 2019. <https://homeland.house.gov/activities/hearings/promoting-safe-and-efficient-travel-and-trade-at-americas-land-ports-of-entry>.

⁴ Ibid.

For ports of entry across the country like Santa Teresa to continue to their growth and adapt to the likely increased commerce created by the USMCA, it is essential that you allocate funding for port modernization efforts and for increased OFO staffing.

Finally, technology needs at our ports of entry should be at the forefront of our priorities for CBP, as transnational criminal organizations continue to smuggle lethal drugs like heroin, methamphetamine and fentanyl – the primary driver of the opioid crisis – through our land ports of entry.⁵

Alarming, only 15 percent of commercial vehicles and less than 2 percent of passenger vehicles that enter the United States through land ports of entry are scanned with non-intrusive inspection systems to detect contraband.⁶

Last year, I introduced legislation that passed the House of Representatives aiming to increase the rate of NII scanning of vehicles entering the United States to 100 percent. I urge you to consider the bill's provisions to ensure CBP has the necessary resources to increase scanning rates and to make sure Congress exercises its oversight authorities to hold CBP accountable for its congressionally directed mandates.

⁵ U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. "2019 National Drug Threat Assessment." December 2019. https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-01/2019-NDTA-final-01-14-2020_Low_Web-DIR-007-20_2019.pdf

⁶ Testimony of Hector Mancha, El Paso Director of Field Operations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, for a hearing titled "Promoting Safe and Efficient Travel and Trade at America's Land Ports of Entry" before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability. December 2, 2019. <https://homeland.house.gov/activities/hearings/promoting-safe-and-efficient-travel-and-trade-at-americas-land-ports-of-entry>.

Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today, and thank you for your daily dedication to protecting our homeland security.