



TESTIMONY
OF
ALEJANDRO N. MAYORKAS
SECRETARY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
REGARDING A HEARING ON
“DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND
OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES”
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
May 26, 2021
Washington, D.C.

Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, Ranking Member Fleischmann, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

It is a privilege to appear before you today to discuss the Department of Homeland Security's Fiscal Year 2022 Budget.

On a daily basis, the more than 240,000 men and women of DHS respond to our Nation's most serious threats. DHS employees rise to every challenge, and the challenges are many. DHS is aggressively pursuing the Administration's priorities and addressing some of the most critical and evolving threats to the United States. We are focusing on defeating the COVID-19 pandemic, advancing technology for border security while promoting a humane and efficient immigration system, combatting Domestic Violent Extremism (DVE), and detecting, deterring, and recovering from malicious cyber-attacks. While I am unable to address the details of the Budget until it is officially released, I would like to highlight the work we have undertaken so far at DHS under the Biden-Harris Administration, as well as the priorities included in the FY 2022 President's Budget.

Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 has impacted every facet of the American way of life, and DHS has been integral to the effort to successfully and equitably distribute COVID-19 vaccinations across the country. The Federal Emergency Management Agency helped vaccinate more than 5 million people at our community vaccination sites and remains committed to assisting government and nonprofit partners to help defeat this deadly pandemic. FEMA helped stand up over 1,000 federally-supported community vaccination centers. FEMA has provided more than \$4.6 billion in support of vaccinations across the country.

As Secretary, I have no greater obligation than that of ensuring the health and safety of our workforce, 80 percent of whom are frontline or public-facing employees. Five days into the Biden-Harris Administration, DHS launched Operation Vaccinate Our Workforce (VOW) to accelerate the administration of COVID-19 vaccines on a voluntary basis to frontline and public-facing DHS employees. On the first day of the Biden-Harris Administration, less than two percent of our frontline workforce who elected to receive the vaccine had been vaccinated. Today, that share has grown to more than 77 percent. Prioritizing the health and safety needs of the DHS workforce has enabled us to fulfill our mission even in a constrained COVID-19 environment. Operation VOW partnered with the Veterans Health Administration, a world-class healthcare system, to get COVID-19 vaccines into the arms of our frontline personnel.

Our public health and medical professionals from the Chief Medical Officer's staff participated in the whole of government approach to combat the pandemic by serving on the Federal Healthcare Resilience Task Force, the Medical Countermeasures (MCM) Task Force, and deploying as part of a tactical medical assistance team. These efforts resulted in life-saving Personal Protective Equipment preservation best practices, the accelerated development, manufacture, and availability of COVID-19 MCMs, and the implementation of novel clinical and operational interventions that saved lives in diverse communities across the Nation.

Addressing the Challenges at the Border

Since April 2020, the number of encounters at the border has been rising due to ongoing violence, natural disasters, food insecurity, and poverty in the Northern Triangle countries of Central America. This resulted in a substantial strain on the processing, transportation, and holding capacity of the U.S. Border Patrol. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the recommended temporary holding capacity within all Border Patrol facilities had also been reduced by 75% to allow for increased physical distancing and to reduce the further spread of the disease. Compounding this challenge is the fact that the previous administration dismantled our Nation's immigration system, terminated the Central American Minors program, and cut hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid to the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. As a result, the recent surge in unaccompanied children presented a serious challenge for DHS and our colleagues at the Department of Health and Human Services.

On March 13, I directed FEMA to support a government-wide effort to safely receive, shelter, and transfer unaccompanied children to HHS care and custody and onward to a verified sponsor. FEMA immediately integrated and co-located with HHS to look at every available option to support a quick expansion of HHS's physical capacity for the care and custody of unaccompanied children, and to support HHS in managing overall operations. FEMA has deployed more than 100 employees to help HHS identify locations for emergency shelters, oversee construction, and manage operations.

Additionally, U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) has trained and deployed more than 350 of its personnel to virtually interview unaccompanied children and potential sponsors, in order to provide case management for unaccompanied children in HHS custody at Emergency Intake Sites (EIS). As of May 4, 2021, USCIS personnel have conducted nearly 4,000 interviews and recommended more than 2,200 children for release to a sponsor. CBP also constructed additional soft-sided facilities and stood up the interagency Movement Coordination Cell (MCC) to bring together colleagues from FEMA, HHS, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and CBP to share a common operating picture. More than 400 additional DHS volunteers stepped up to help through the DHS Volunteer Force.

Between March 13 and May 1, FEMA assisted in the activation of fourteen HHS EIS facilities. EIS facilities are operating in Texas, California, and Michigan, increasing the potential temporary bed capacity when fully staffed by 19,987 beds, or 1,999 percent.

This additional bed capacity, along with improvements in the process of safely releasing unaccompanied children to sponsors, has resulted in the reduction of the total number of unaccompanied children in CBP custody from 5,767 at its peak on March 29th to 455 on May 11th. During this same period, the number of unaccompanied children who have been in custody longer than 72 hours has decreased from 4,078 at its peak on March 29th to zero on the morning of May 11th, while average time in custody for unaccompanied children has fallen from 133 hours on March 29th to 22 hours on the morning of May 11th. This progress occurred while CBP encountered 18,000 unaccompanied children in the month of April. For the seven-day period ending May 10th, CBP transferred an average of 422 unaccompanied children per day to ORR,

approximately two-thirds of CBP's total unaccompanied child population on a given day and more than keeping pace with daily apprehensions.

Stopping the Threat of Domestic Violent Extremism

As threats against the Nation evolve, it is critical that the Department adapts quickly and efficiently when necessary to meet any threat against the people of the United States. Domestic violent extremism is typically fueled by false narratives, conspiracy theories, and extremist rhetoric usually spread through social media and other online platforms. The lethality of this threat is all too real, as witnessed during the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 and recent attacks across the United States, including against government buildings, personnel, and minority groups. DHS is prioritizing addressing this threat while improving the quality of our intelligence gathering and analysis, information sharing, and DVE detection, prevention, and response efforts.

Combatting this violence requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, which I have already initiated at DHS in collaboration with key partners, including the Department of Justice, to help ensure the violence and assault on democracy that occurred on January 6th does not occur again. DHS has established a new, dedicated domestic terrorism branch within the Department's Office of Intelligence and Analysis, and recently established a new Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, replacing the Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention. Further, DHS is increasing training opportunities for law enforcement partners, including through threat assessment and management programs related to domestic violent extremism. DHS also announced an internal review of the potential threat of DVE within the Department.

In February, I designated, for the first time, combatting domestic violent extremism as a "National Priority Area" for the FY 2021 State Homeland Security Program and Urban Area Security Initiative grant programs. As a result, state, local, tribal, and territorial governments are required to spend 7.5 percent of their DHS grant awards combating this threat. On March 24, the Department made \$20 million available through the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program to help communities across our country develop innovative capabilities to combat terrorism and targeted violence.

Bolstering Cybersecurity and Critical Infrastructure

Our Nation faces constant cyber threats from nation states and criminal groups alike. Earlier this month, the United States suffered a significant ransomware attack against its critical infrastructure. Over the past months, we discovered several intrusion campaigns impacting the federal government. As the Nation's lead agency for protecting the federal civilian government network and critical infrastructure against cybersecurity threats, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) serves a central role by enabling greater visibility into cybersecurity threats, strengthening incident response capabilities, and driving improvements in security practices. Congress recently empowered and further strengthened CISA through several provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act that the Department is now focused on implementing.

On May 12, President Biden issued an Executive Order to bolster our Nation's cybersecurity and protect federal government networks. This Order will empower DHS and our interagency partners to modernize federal cybersecurity, expand information sharing, and dramatically improve our ability to prevent, detect, assess, and remediate cyber incidents. We are actively working to implement the Executive Order to help agencies improve their security posture, develop a standard playbook for incident response, and establish a Cyber Safety Review Board comprised of public and private sector stakeholders.

In addition to the NDAA and the Executive Order, I announced a series of 60-day "sprints" to mobilize action across the Department focusing on specific priority areas. The first sprint is dedicated to the fight against ransomware, a particularly egregious type of malicious cyber activity that usually does not discriminate whom it targets. The second is dedicated to building a more robust and diverse workforce at the Department and beyond. We are currently in the midst of advancing these sprints before we will turn to better protecting industrial control systems, cybersecurity in the context of our transportation systems, and our election infrastructure.

Funding Priorities for FY 2022

As the Department supports the priorities of the new Administration, we recognize the opportunities to partner with Congress in a variety of efforts, both foreign and domestic, to take DHS into the future. Focusing on advanced technology for border security, promoting an orderly, safe, and humane immigration system, enhancing privacy and civil rights protections, and supporting Federal, State, local, and private entities' efforts to detect, deter, and recover from malicious cyber-attacks, these priorities directly impact the security and safety of Americans. The FY 2022 President's Budget will ensure that we have the tools we need to meet our mission.

While I am unable to address the specific DHS items for the FY 2022 President's Budget, I would like to highlight the Administration's priorities that were included in the recent discretionary request. The President's FY 2022 discretionary request provides \$52.2 billion for DHS, approximately equal to the FY 2021 enacted level.

The discretionary request provides approximately \$1.2 billion for border infrastructure that includes construction and modernization of land Ports of Entry; investments in modern border security technology and assets; and, efforts to ensure the safe, orderly, and humane treatment of migrants in CBP custody. These investments would facilitate security screening to combat human smuggling and trafficking, the movement of illicit drugs and weapons, as well as provide for the more efficient processing of legal trade, travel, and commerce through the Nation's Ports of Entry. In addition, the request includes no new funding for border wall construction and proposes the cancellation of prior-year wall construction balances that are unobligated when Congress takes action on the FY 2022 request.

The FY 2022 request supports the promise of a fair and equitable immigration system that enforces our immigration laws and reflects the Nation's values. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services identified \$345 million in the discretionary request to address

naturalization, asylum, and other program backlogs, supporting up to 125,000 refugee admissions in 2022, and addressing systems and operations modernization. In addition, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement will expand access to the Alternatives to Detention program and provides enhanced case management services, particularly for families seeking asylum.

Along with the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the discretionary request expands DHS's work with State and local communities to prepare for the impacts of climate change. The discretionary request invests an additional \$540 million above the 2021 enacted level to incorporate climate impacts into pre-disaster planning and resilience efforts. This funding level also supports a resilient infrastructure community grant program, which prioritizes climate resilience projects for vulnerable and historically underserved communities. In addition, the discretionary request continues investments in the incident response workforce to ensure sufficient personnel are trained and available for deployment to help communities respond to future disasters. The discretionary request would also increase the number of FEMA staff equipped to support communities in order to prepare and respond to disasters in an equitable manner.

The discretionary request provides a total of \$131 million to support diverse, innovative, and community-driven methods to prevent domestic terrorism while respecting privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties. This funding builds on the 2021 enacted level, while supporting critical research on the root causes of radicalization and enhanced community outreach. The request includes \$20 million for grants to build local capacity to prevent targeted violence and all forms of terrorism, in addition to approximately \$75 million available under the FEMA Homeland Security Grant Program.

The discretionary request addresses, in a variety of ways, the challenges and potential threats identified by recent cybersecurity incidents. The discretionary request provides \$2.1 billion for CISA, which builds on the \$650 million provided for CISA in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. This funding would allow CISA to enhance its cybersecurity tools, hire highly qualified experts, and obtain support services to protect and defend Federal information technology systems. The discretionary request also proposes \$618 million for investments in research, development, and innovation across the Department, to lay a strong and relevant foundation for securing the American public from future threats. These projects focus on climate resilience, cybersecurity data analytics, and transportation security technologies while building on existing infrastructure throughout the Department.

I am honored to support and represent the dedicated DHS workforce. Their commitment to the dynamic homeland security mission is unwavering, and I vow to do everything in my authority as Secretary to ensure they are resourced, compensated, and recognized appropriately. Therefore, I ask for your continued support in providing the resources we need to meet our mission.

I look forward to discussing the FY 2022 President's Budget in greater detail when it is officially released, and I welcome any questions that you have at this time.