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Good morning Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and distinguished Members. I am honored to be with you today to discuss cooperation and support by the United States for primarily three Central American countries; El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. As the committee is well aware, these countries comprise the largest number of people appearing at our border with Mexico, generally to make a claim for asylum.

I was intimately familiar with the situation in the McAllen, Texas area along the Rio Grande river. I was sworn in as Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection in March, 2014. A week later I was in McAllen where I would spend many nights over the summer. During that summer of 2014, approximately 68,000 unaccompanied minors and family units entered the U.S., primarily in that area of the border. I repeatedly praised and continue to praise the efforts and work of the men and women of the U.S. Border Patrol during that period. With very little assistance, they processed, fed, clothed (often bringing clothing from their own children) and housed these children for days at a time. Their efforts extended far beyond what is expected for a Border Patrol Station which is meant for temporary or short-term detention. Those numbers of unaccompanied minors and family units increased in 2014 from the previous year and the previous two years had shown increases that the Border Patrol recognized.

The numbers in the summer of 2014 clearly demonstrated that existing facilities and the support available were insufficient to manage this volume. In a relatively short period of time, CBP purchased a large warehouse and converted it into a processing center; FEMA provided other facilities for detention, as did the U.S. Military and the Border Patrol Training Center in New Mexico. Contracts were

secured for food handling, health care, and security so Border Patrol Agents could resume duties on the border instead of performing these non-enforcement related functions. By the time this surge of youth and family units subsided CBP and DHS were far better equipped to deal with increases.

During the many days I spent along the border I had the opportunity to speak with many of the people entering. I was also able to read survey instruments prepared by the Border Patrol, CBP, DHS, and the Department of State. The reasons for attempting entry were not singular. They included: (1) an extreme fear of victimization of gang violence, including homicide or domestic violence; (2) reunification with a family member currently residing in the United States; or, (3) the quest for better economic security for one's family or a better education for one's child.

Before I entered federal service, other than my two years in the Army and with the Department of Justice, I served as a career law enforcement officer, including servicing as the Chief of Police of two large U.S. cities. The words I heard, from these refugee families, were no different, with the exception of reunification, then those I heard from people living in the communities I was sworn to protect and serve.

Just as the safety and security of a community in America rests primarily with the people who reside and work there, so too does that apply to the three Central American countries we are focused on today. Law enforcement and local government are responsible for providing the resources and support to improve community safety in America. That has also been the focus of a great deal of the funding provided to both U.S. interagency operations and these three countries; to improve their safety and security, and by improving the economy, and educational opportunities.

I saw the results of these efforts first hand in multiple trips to Central America. The law enforcement agencies received the benefit of U.S. resources in training and equipment. For example, in El Salvador we saw homicides decrease. The Placed Based Strategy, similar to what law enforcement does here in the U.S., implemented in 2015 showed results in 2017 with fewer people leaving that country for the U.S.

I know that without safety and security and the future for a better life in those countries that merely apprehending people entering the United States is not a solution to this problem. I know that our advertising campaigns, carefully thought out and widely circulated in Central America advising of the dangers and consequences of making a dangerous trek to the U.S. had little impact.

Other examples of support include training and technical assistance from experts in forensics, money laundering, and transnational organized crime. CBP provided guidance on border security and was able to assist in understanding the importance of customs regulations that can be of value when improving trade and the economy.

The relationship between CBP and our counterparts in Mexico also showed significant improvements. The infamous trains known as “La Bestia” with hundreds of individuals on the roof and hanging onto the sides were eliminated by Mexican authorities. Mexico’s Federal Police and intelligence agencies shared critical information with CBP and other federal law enforcement agencies that was used to apprehend human traffickers. Mexico’s immigration authority set up checkpoints on the border with Guatemala and the interior of Mexico and detained and returned thousands of people that had crossed into Mexico.

In summary, with over 40 years in law enforcement I recognize and appreciate that protecting a community is a long-term investment. I saw the beginnings of that investment in Central America with the aid and support of the United States and I saw the returns: significantly lower numbers of people attempting to enter the United States in FY 2015 and 2016 then in FY 2014 during the surge of UAC’s and family units.

The support for a prolonged and focused effort in Central America is critical to not just those countries but to America’s security and economy.