

TESTIMONY OF MAYRA CANTU

For a Hearing Before the House Committee on Homeland Security
“An Unbearable Price: The Devastating Human Costs of the Biden-Mayorkas Border Crisis”

Sept. 13, 2023

Good morning, Chairman Mark Green and distinguished members of the committee.

I am honored and humbled to be here with all of you. I thank you for inviting me and for taking an interest in my testimony.

I am Mayra Cantu and I am a Border Patrol Wife. My husband has been serving our country for over 15 years. We have been married for 21 years and have 3 amazing kids. Dylan, Lex and Devyn. Once my husband joined the Border Patrol, he got stationed in Eagle Pass, Texas. We were then living in the Rio Grande Valley also known as the Tip of Texas. So we moved our little family from Edinburg, Texas to Eagle Pass, Texas, leaving both of our families behind. Being moved from the area you live in is very common in the Border Patrol. We spent 10 years in Eagle Pass, Texas where my husband served on the ground unit, ATV Unit and the Boat Unit. After 10 years we were able to transfer back home to the Rio Grande Valley where my husband is currently stationed.

Today I speak with the experiences and knowledge of a Border Patrol wife. A wife, that through God's grace has been given the opportunity to speak on a topic that never gets asked about. No one ever asks about the over 19,000 American souls and their families that have also been affected by the shift in policies and procedures that have drastically and tragically changed our country, as of January 2021.

The over 19,000 American, voting, serving souls I speak of are our very own United States Border Patrol Agents and us, the spouses and children of these agents. Our men and women in green are those who are not only our 1st line of defense but also, our actual boots on the ground, on the riverbanks of the Rio Grande River, our checkpoints, and all American borders in our country.

Us Border Patrol Families are not just Patriotic Americans, we are voting Americans, of both sides of the aisle. We are your constituents. With that being said, I ask that everyone please take a moment to truly understand what these 19,000 souls and us, the families, are facing every day with this huge influx of immigration, along with the shift in policies and procedures.

January 2021 was the day everything changed for us Border Patrol families. On that day our men and women in green went into work knowing that they were outnumbered. They knew our Border Patrol Stations would be at max capacity, they knew we did not have enough facilities, enough vehicles, they knew they were defeated.

Respectfully I say, imagine that on your first day of work with the new boss. In my opinion, Day 1 was a significant hit to our agents. Day 1 was realizing the fact that they were not going to catch, stop or prevent these huge caravans of people aggressively pushing their way into the paths of our agents. You see in an outsider's perspective, you see a caravan as a large group of

people entering our country. For us Border Patrol families, we see caravans as the people my husband will come across face to face. I remember having plenty of conversations with my husband, as a concerned wife, was always filled with questions like, “What are you going to do? What is the plan? What does work say? What can be done?”

In 2008, my kids and I drove to Artesia, New Mexico, to attend the Border Patrol graduation ceremony for my husband. It is an experience I will always remember. As an attendee, I was filled with such patriotism. I was so proud of my country at how honorable the Border Patrol was presenting each graduating class. They all marched and presented their class flag with such pride. They all stood together looking so sharp, as they recited their oath to protect you, me and our entire country with vigilance, service and integrity.

That badge, that oath means something to our agents...but these past two and a half years our agents feel as if their hands have been tied behind their backs, unable to do their job as they were taught. Leaving them with the human emotion of frustration and let down creating an overall sense of low morale throughout the patrol.

As the days went by with these extreme changes, I noticed my husband’s mood began to change. He became more distant, kept to himself, and would spend his days sleeping during the day. I figured it was work and he was potentially taking longer to decompress. As things got worse on the border, so did my husband. My husband began to talk about work in his sleep. But the sounds he would make hardly sounded like words, they were screams of terror, so loud I had to close our bedroom door so that he wouldn’t wake up our kids. One night as he tossed and began to mumble some words, he all of a sudden screamed out “LA NIÑA! LA NIÑA!?” Was so terrified, I froze. I then realized my husband was reliving the trauma of work in his sleep.

I know the job is stressful, but I had no idea how bad things had gotten. I would sit with my husband and ask him every day how he was doing at work. I knew this would help him snap out of work mode to be able to continue his regular family life routine. I learned that my husband was manning Tent City on a daily basis. At this point we could hear in the news how so many stations were at max capacity due to the caravans of family units. This meant that our agents, including my husband, had to interview unaccompanied juveniles.

As an agent these stories come with the job. The difference now is the amount of stories our agents hear on a daily basis was and is off the charts. If you can imagine, a child who has just been through such a horrible, traumatizing journey, may have possibly seen a family member drown, or them being abused or tortured by bad people, has now gained the trust of a Border Patrol Agent handing the child a snack....The child decides to vent and release every emotion he or she has been holding back because of fear...to this agent and is now looking up at this agent for comfort. For answers.

With 800 other illegal immigrants in that tent city, this agent knows hundreds are already being bussed over...What could this agent possibly tell this child in that short time? Our agents are fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, they are real humans with human emotions...emotions like anger, frustration, sadness, sympathy, and every emotion you or I would feel if we heard those stories.

To that I ask Mr. Mayorkas, what has been done to assist our agents to handle these situations? What is the protocol? What are the proper procedures for our agents when confronted with these situations?

We all knew for months in advance that the caravans of family units were coming. We all knew what the journey was going to be for those women and children. You knew our agents were going to be the first in line to handle these traumatized individuals. What was the plan for them? This Border Patrol wife is asking what was the plan for our agents who would be hearing these stories from the millions of illegal immigrants you knew were crossing.

Did you consider the long-term effects on an agent's mental and spiritual health from listening to the horrific tragedies from the millions of illegal immigrants that would be crossing? What are you doing now, two and a half years later?

As a wife allow me to describe what happens. Our agents with boots on the ground carry those stories with them. They carry the names and faces of those children, women and even those good men that may have had a family member get swept under the river. Their stories come up through out their day as they themselves try to live their normal life. It fills their thoughts daily to the point where normal life situations are no longer as relevant as those tragic stories they hear at work. This creates a challenge for a family as a whole. Us wives end up having to take over every situation at home. Distance grows between a husband and a wife. This creates many more arguments, frustrations, resentments. Our children unfortunately get sidelined. How could a failing grade ever come close to what our agents go through at work? This creates distance between our agents and our children. The burden of not being able to help or fix the problems at work become so overwhelming it consumes an agent's mind to the point where he lashes out in anger, short tempered. This creates even more problems in a happy home. Without an agent even realizing it, problems at home end up being grater than he or she imagined. In many cases an agent turns to alcohol. Solitude. Nightmares. And all of a sudden we end up with undiagnosed PTSD. Our worst-case scenario is a potential divorce, topped with depression...and just like that our Border Patrol Agents end up with a high suicide rate.

How can this happen you ask? Well, lets not forget to mention the stress of forced vaccination. Our agents were being told that they had to get vaccinated or get fired.

This man-made perfect storm is what has our agency with higher numbers in substance abuse, divorce rate and suicide rate.

As for me, I don't need to look up statistics or check the news to know. I know because I live the Border Patrol life. Our Green line represents family, united in Faith.

Distinguished members of Congress, we must make a change. Our country deserves better. Your constituents deserve better.

My greatest fear is allowing government to disregard our Border Patrol Agents as they did once to our military.

Thank you and may God bless all of you, our country and may God Bless our Border Patrol.