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House of Representatives
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The Honorable Dan Bishop
Committee on Homeland Security
Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight,
Investigations, and Accountability
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Glenn Ivey
Committee on Homeland Security
Ranking Member, Subcommittee
on Oversight, Investigations, and
Accountability
U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Ivey,

Thank you both for inviting myself and our fellow colleagues to join you all on this critical hearing to discuss America's northern border. I would also like to thank Congresswoman Stefanik, Congressman Stauber, and Congressman Higgins for their service and testimony today. Northern border security is an issue that has been ignored for far too long. I am so pleased to see the Committee giving our northern communities, northern border agents, and northern Members a voice in protecting all regions of our homeland.

I have had the distinct pleasure of representing Pennsylvania's Northwest communities in the U.S. House for the last twelve years. I have made it my mission to actively engage with all different sectors of our area: companies, schools, families, and hardworking Pennsylvanians. Among those hardworking Americans are our incredible Customs and Border Protection agents. We are blessed to have these brave men and women of the CBP Buffalo Sector patrolling the waters of Lake Erie, including the 40+ miles that I represent in Pennsylvania.

Throughout my twelve years serving the district, I have met with these agents to discuss their needs, priorities, and day-to-day operations out of their sector and station. Typically, our meetings are upbeat and swift. Reports are standard and the agents are optimistic. Last year, I once again visited the Erie station to chat with agents. This time was different. Agents had serious concerns. They were seeing a spike in drug and gun smuggling along their patrol area. At the same time, agents were forced to be inside at a desk doing digital processing work to assist with the influx of migrants in the south. Overall morale for these men and women was clearly low. This change in tone led to me and my team digging into what exactly was going on along the northern border.

Meanwhile down south, over the last two years, we have witnessed tragedies at our Southern border. Southern states have been overwhelmed with record illegal immigration, drug smuggling and crime that has continuously poured into the local communities. The Biden administration has sat back and watched these great states bear the brunt of disastrous and dangerous policies. Under the current administration, there seems to be no end in sight. Understandably, all the attention has been on the Southern border. At the same time, as we found out, America's Northern border has been ignored all while quietly facing its own crises.

According to Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data, in fiscal year 2022, US Border Patrol agents had 2,238 encounters at the northern border. Now, in just the first four months of FY23, encounters have skyrocketed to 2,856 and surpassed the total of last year's encounters. Agents continue to put themselves in harm's way to keep our communities safe, and this 475% increase in encounters from the first four months of FY22 is both unsustainable and symptomatic of this administration's broader failure to secure the border. As temperatures reach sub-zero levels and USBP agents conduct life-saving search and rescue missions, Secretary Mayorkas continues to insist that he is managing the border in a safe, orderly, and humane manner. However, our northern border is on track to see nearly 7,000 encounters in FY23, while the administration continues to downplay the threat posed by a wide-open northern border.

Specifically, the Swanton sector apprehended more undocumented immigrants in the previous four months than the last two fiscal years combined. In December 2022, a record 441 migrants from 19 different countries were apprehended attempting to cross into the U.S. through this sector. Further west, tragic stories, like an Indian family of four freezing to death as they attempted to cross into North Dakota, highlight the dangers DHS leaders have created for migrants and the brave men and women of USBP.

In addition to increases in illegal immigration, the northern border has seen a spike in drug smuggling. Excluding marijuana, drug smuggling seizure weight increased by nearly 600% along the northern border from FY21 to FY22. More specifically, khat increased 1,756%, ecstasy increased 1,736%, ketamine increased 663%, and methamphetamine increased 204%. Even more concerning, CBP seized 14 pounds of fentanyl in FY22 along the northern border; enough to kill an estimated 3.17 million people. The damage this lethal drug can do to a community has been well-documented over the years, notably across New England states. We cannot allow another avenue for fentanyl smuggling into our communities that are already inundated by the drug crisis down south.

As record levels of border encounters and drug smuggling continue to rise, USBP staffing on the northern border has remained relatively static. In between the 138 ports of entry in our northern states, only 2,019 USBP agents have been assigned to protect and monitor the 5,525 border miles. Along with being under-staffed, our northern border agents and DHS does not even have situational awareness of the crises. In a 2019 analysis, the U.S. Government Accountability

Office (GAO) stated DHS does not even have performance measures to assess security along the northern border. GAO concluded, “While CBP has performance measures...some of which include data from the Northern border, it does not have specific measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the Northern border between ports of entry.”

Not only do our states in the north face an ever-growing border concern, but we have firsthand knowledge and real-life experience of the broken immigration system. The Biden administration spent much of the last two years covertly dropping groups of migrants into communities across the country. This hit home when Health and Human Services shipped 144 unaccompanied migrant children to an emergency intake site in Erie, Pennsylvania. There was no notification or alert given to local leaders, the people of Erie, and myself. For months, we tried to get information regarding the situation – why was the Erie site chosen, what was the amount of taxpayer money spent, and where were these children taken following Erie? It took 17 months to get an answer from HHS and Secretary Becerra. Time after time, it has become clear to me that this administration is fine with security issues along our border and within our country as long as the headlines do not follow.

Once we understood the increasing issues along our northern border, we knew attention had to be brought to the problems. I circled up with fellow northern border members, such as Rep. Stefanik and Rep. Ryan Zinke. I thought I would be introducing them to these issues, but they were more than aware, bringing along stories of migrants freezing to death in the cold New York winters and deputized posses patrolling the Montana mountainside to combat drug traffickers.

We all agreed the Biden administration had to be held accountable for their neglect to our northern border and that is why we introduced the Northern Border Security Caucus. The caucus is a coalition of 29 members of Congress who share the vision of securing all of America’s borders and ensuring that the 13 border states and five Great Lakes in the north are receiving the attention and resources they deserve. Through the work of our new caucus, and that of House Republicans at large, we plan to show the Biden administration that our broken immigration system isn’t simply a talking point: it’s a critical issue that affects our entire country.

By calling attention to the northern border, we do not want to minimize the record illegal immigration, drug smuggling and crime that have ravaged communities along the U.S.-Mexico border. Instead, we are amplifying that message. More must be done to secure all of our borders; to protect our communities from deadly drugs; and to give leaders from northern states a greater voice in solving our nation’s troubled immigration system.

Although we serve on House committees that address policies other than immigration, like so many in Congress, this issue found us. Members of Congress from both the north and the south have practical solutions to the joint border crises at hand. We plan to give a greater voice to the American people who, until now, have been left out of the conversation. I once again thank the

Committee for welcoming myself and my fellow colleagues to testify on the issues facing America's northern border.