



National Border Patrol Council

**Testimony of Rosemarie Pepperdine
On behalf of the National Border Patrol Council
In front of The House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security
January 9th, 2018**

Background

Chairwoman McSally, Ranking Member Vela, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I would like to thank you all for inviting me to testify today. I began my career with the U.S. Border Patrol in 1996. During the first half of my career I was stationed in El Cajon, California and in 2005 I transferred to the Tucson Sector. I am proud to work side by side with the resilient men and women of the Border Patrol who are driven to address the challenges that our Nation faces along the border.

I would like to address three themes this morning that highlight how we can more effectively utilize our limited manpower.

Fencing

Currently 653 miles of the nearly 2,000 miles of the southern border is fenced at a cost of nearly \$7 billion since FY 2007. This fencing consists of:

- 353 miles of primary fencing
- 300 miles of vehicle fencing
- 36 miles of secondary fencing behind the primary fencing
- 14 miles of tertiary fencing behind the secondary fence

Fencing is a tool that allows Agents to maximize their available manpower. It is not however a single solution to illegal immigration and drug trafficking. Illegal immigrants and drug traffickers routinely go over, under, and through existing fencing. Fencing without the manpower to arrest those who penetrate it is not a prudent investment.

What fencing does do is allow us to maximize our manpower. Generally speaking, in areas where there is no primary fencing, it takes one Agent to secure a linear mile of the border. However, in areas where there is fencing we can increase the range of an Agent to three miles.

With that said, I want to be clear about our position on fencing. Our first priority is placing secondary fencing behind the primary fencing that we already have. This can be done quickly and at a nominal cost. To put this in perspective, the 36 miles of secondary fencing already in place was constructed for \$2 million per mile.

Beyond secondary fencing, we believe that only about 300 additional miles of primary fencing is needed. The 300 miles of new fencing would focus on areas such as Del Rio, Laredo, and the Tohono Odem Indian Reservation in Arizona.

Interoperable Communications

Effective communication is both a force multiplier and a critical component to Agent safety. In CBP's FY 2017 Congressional Budget Request stated that 18,000 units lack adequate security voice encryption, 25,000 units have exceeded their useful life, and 35,000 units cannot communicate with State and local law enforcement agencies.

For most of my career, I have been issued a radio that often times does not work in the field. The primary issue is the lack of signal coverage. Essentially if you are not within close proximity of a CBP radio tower you cannot communicate. When working in remote areas alone and without backup, an inoperable radio quickly becomes a safety issue. Many times in my career, I had visual of a fellow Agent but could not communicate via my service radio and in some instances I had to use my personal cell phone to communicate to other Agents.

With that said, the Council would like to thank the Committee for including language in the Border Security for America Act calling for future radio procurements to include LTE capability. Most likely, everyone in this room has a smartphone with LTE capability. Right now there are LTE capable public safety radios that can operate on CBP's radio communication system. If a signal is not available, you are able to switch to a commercial LTE provider. This LTE capability is a quantum leap forward and will greatly improve both Agent safety and effectiveness.

Supervisor Staffing Levels and Agents Doing Non-Agent Work

The Border Patrol is an extremely top heavy organization with far too many layers of management and a convoluted chain of command. Although Congress has appropriated funds to double the size of the Border Patrol, we have unfortunately not doubled the number of Agents in the field.

To put this in perspective, the average large size police department has one supervisor for every 10 officers. The Border Patrol has one supervisor for every 4 Agents. Why do we have twice as many supervisors as other large law enforcement agencies? Your guess is as good as mine.

The reason, in my opinion, that this imbalance has been able to persist is that in headquarters there are only about 300 Agents. The real management bloat has been at the sector and station level. In some sectors we have more Agents assigned than we do at headquarters. The Council has long advocated that Congress should force the agency to right size its management structure to something more in line with other law enforcement agencies.

In addition, allow me to offer another efficiency Border Patrol should definitely pursue – processing. Anyone arrested by the Border Patrol is brought back to the station and processed before being turned over to either ICE, or voluntarily returned to their country. This includes taking biometrics, running a criminal background check for outstanding warrants, and filling out the appropriate paperwork. Depending on how busy it is in some locations, you can have up to 15 to 20 percent of the Agents bogged down processing and not active in the field. In comparison, many police departments have civilian employees, who make considerably less than officers, handle the bulk of the processing.

Thank you for your time this morning and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.