



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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Media Contact: Susan Phalen
(202) 226-8477

**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Candice Miller (R-Mich.)
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security**

“Securing the Maritime Border: The Future of CBP Air and Marine”

Remarks as Prepared

Amongst CBP’s missions and responsibilities, maritime security is not often front page news. Nonetheless, this does not mean it is not an important part of their overall border security efforts. Our coastal and maritime borders are long and cover millions of square miles. My home State of Michigan alone has over 3,000 miles of Great Lakes coastline and shares many miles of maritime border with Canada.

Illicit drug and migrant flows remain principle concerns of our border security agencies, and rightly so. However, as we have seen on our nation’s California coast, as we strengthen security along the southern land border, the cartels adapt – sending panga boats as far north as San Francisco.

From the Great Lakes, to the coast of California, to the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean and Central America transit zones, the maritime security components of the Department of Homeland Security have a lot of sea to cover. As a result, they must coordinate effectively, share intelligence to understand the threat and smartly position resources to stop it.

The need for maritime domain awareness, or the ability to understand where illicit traffic is most likely to occur, cannot be understated. Without this understanding, drugs will continue to transit the maritime corridors and migrants will make the perilous journey to this country. Radar coverage of the Great Lakes, and other areas along the border, is far from complete, which could allow low flying aircraft and vessels to move drugs and other contraband with ease.

Within Customs and Border Protection, CBP’s Office of Air and Marine has a fleet of over 280 marine vessels and more than 250 aircraft, making it essentially the largest civilian law enforcement air force in the world. They have an enormous responsibility to interdict drugs and migrants using the sea as a means to enter the country.

Today, I want to explore how CBP Air and Marine, a relatively small operational component of CBP, fits into the larger maritime security strategy of DHS. How Air and Marine's authorities support and compliment the Coast Guard's security and interdiction missions, Border Patrol's riverine responsibilities, provide aviation support to other components like ICE and FEMA, and most importantly, examine the security value that American taxpayer is getting for the roughly \$750 million dollars they spend every year.

Without question, the work that the men and women of Air and Marine do is dangerous. Last month, one of their helicopters was struck by two bullets fired from the Mexican side of the border. Thankfully our agents were not injured. And Air and Marine has had other serious incidents over the last few years including: the complete loss of a maritime variant of the Predator on a maritime mission off the coast of California, an incident where a smuggler fired multiple rounds from an AK-47 at our agents near the Virgin Islands and a recent collision with another vessel off the coast of California that resulted in the capsizing of the vessel and the loss of life.

The vessels and aviation assets our Agents use to perform this dangerous work are aging. Recapitalization of the aging CBP Air and Marine fleet has been a long term priority and a significant budgetary challenge. For example, Air and Marine has experienced difficulty procuring a new Coastal Interceptor Vessel to replace the Midnight Express, a boat they first acquired long before the creation of DHS.

While I am pleased CBP awarded a contract to procure up to 52 Coastal Interceptor Vessels just two weeks ago, this award comes after a series of delays, and nearly five years from the time CBP initially announced its intent to purchase new marine vessels to replace the aging fleet, which has been in service since the 80s.

Better planning between the Office of Air and Marine and the Coast Guard has the potential to save taxpayer dollars, especially when components conduct similar missions and have recently procured similar boats, fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. The Department needs to ensure components are working together to ensure efficiencies can be gained both operationally and with the procurement of additional assets.

In addition, this subcommittee and Committee has been on record multiple times calling for robust border security metrics that measure the state of border security. They are largely absent in the border security debate, and a valuable tool to help CBP deploy resources appropriately or come to Congress with additional needs.

Finding the right set of metrics to gauge performance is not an easy task, but it must be done.

Air and Marine, as the Inspector General has recently reported, has struggled to develop clear, concrete performance metrics that will help Congressional decision makers and the American people understand how they contribute to border security in the air and maritime domain, and at what cost.

I look forward to hearing from Mr. Roth on the two controversial Inspector General Reports that cast some doubt on the true cost of the UAV program and missed opportunities to save the tax payer dollars

by leveraging existing DHS resources to upgrade Air and Marine helicopters. And I'm sure General Alles has his own views on these reports.

When it comes to outlining the future of this agency, I understand Air and Marine strategy is currently in its final stages of approval, but was not yet ready in time for this hearing. I hope General Alles will be able to share key aspects of his new strategy with Members to help us understand where he sees this organization going and present his vision for the future of CBP Air and Marine.

Finally, last month the House passed, for the second time, CBP authorization language I authored. This clearly demonstrates that this Committee is keenly interested in the future of this organization and the maritime security value it provides to the nation.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and thank you both for appearing before us today. With that I recognize the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, the Gentleman from Texas, Mr. Vela, for any opening statement he may have.

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