

Timothy Roemer
Director and Chief Information Security Officer, State of Arizona, Department of Homeland Security
Wednesday, March 2, 2022
Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations of the Committee on Homeland Security
Oversight Hearing: "Examining the Court-Ordered Reimplementation of the Remain in Mexico Policy."

Chairwoman Barragán, Ranking member Higgins, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, and other Members in attendance, good afternoon and thank you for allowing me to testify on the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) and how this policy has impacted Arizona, our communities, and our efforts to combat the opioid crisis and dangerous criminal activity coming across our southern border.

MPP is a thoughtful policy that protects migrants looking to the United States of America for a better life and those living in the USA. This is a commonsense policy the Biden administration repealed without thought about the implications to communities and states along the border and those migrants it is meant to protect. The Biden administration only began considering reinstating the policy once such action was court-ordered.

Chairwoman Barragán, members, we need strong, lasting, and consistent application of the Migrant Protection Protocols but also immediate action on the part of the federal government to protect our communities-both on the border and throughout the nation. This isn't just a matter of border security — it's a matter of National Security.

In Arizona, we are the front door to this national crisis. Our border communities, cities, towns, Sheriffs, Police Chiefs, and healthcare facilities are on the frontlines of this national emergency and are the first to suffer from border policy that is not well-reasoned.

Dangerous and deadly drugs, human smuggling, human trafficking, labor trafficking, firearms smuggling, and cartel actions thrive off an unsecured border and patchwork enforcement of even helpful policies.

An unsecured southern border creates a public safety crisis not just in Arizona but across local, state, tribal, and federal jurisdictions throughout our country.

When applied properly, MPP helps protect the lives of every Arizona community and those throughout the nation. Consistent application of strong border security policies, including MPP, gives federal law enforcement authorities the ability to stop individuals from taking advantage of the asylum system and allows the system to work better for those in need. In addition, MPP allows authorities to take substantial action instead of 'Catch-And-Release' tactics from the past that are sadly becoming all too real again today.

With MPP, law enforcement spends less time chasing the same trafficker, smuggler, and coyotes and more time proactively and effectively protecting Arizona and America from

dangerous drugs and transnational criminal organizations who continue to profit off vulnerable populations.

Policies like MPP and Title 42 kept the situation at the border under control. Unfortunately, the Biden administration's reversal of these policies chipped away at the progress made securing the border under the previous administration to make a political statement while putting public safety at risk.

Meanwhile, we all saw a record number of drug overdose deaths nationwide in 2021. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports over 100,306 drug overdose deaths in our country last year. This is a 28.5% increase from the previous year. Furthermore, the data shows that estimated opioid overdose deaths increased to 75,673 in the 12 months ending in April 2021, up from 56,064 the year before. Overdose deaths from synthetic opioids, primarily fentanyl, and psychostimulants such as methamphetamine, also increased in the 12 months ending in April 2021. Cocaine deaths increased as well.

As Governor Ducey has said, "These drugs are slipping through the cracks and into the bloodstream of our communities."

In 2021, the DEA seized more than 9.5 million pills in Arizona, a substantial increase from the six million they seized in 2020.

In December 2021, the DEA, Scottsdale Police, and the Arizona Attorney General's Office worked to seize more than 1.7 million pills in a two-month-long drug bust investigation.

In a separate operation in December, the Arizona Department of Public Safety Troopers seized over 664 pounds of methamphetamine and 37 pounds of fentanyl. Troopers seized these drugs along smuggling routes between southern Arizona and Phoenix. These drugs were being smuggled to Phoenix to be then sold nationwide. The street value of the drugs seized during the operation is over \$5.1 million.

The cartels use America as a business venture and continue to capitalize on federal policies and an insecure border.

Arizona ranchers, farmers, law enforcement, victim services, non-profit organizations, community members, local leaders, and elected officials in our communities and state are all impacted by the migrant population. MPP and border security is not an immigration issue but a humanitarian issue.

Transnational criminal organizations routinely treat vulnerable humans as transactional and reusable goods. Therefore, having a patchworked and mismanaged approach to border security policy, including MPP, is not only insufficient but irresponsible.

Transnational criminal organizations (TCO) profit billions of dollars on human smuggling. Officials estimate TCOs profited \$3 billion from those smuggled into Arizona last year alone. These profits are fueling the drug smuggling operations of the cartels.

The albeit temporary repeal of MPP and similar policies have put vulnerable children in danger.

One family spent six hours in a storm on a small boat, with kids getting horribly sick. The family was kidnapped by a drug cartel and forced to pay a ransom to live during the journey.

Another family was torn apart forever when a mother and her 10-year-old daughter were found dead, and her two-year-old son was the only member to survive the dangerous journey. The two-year-old son was turned over to the federal government's custody — and as Governor Ducey has said, the federal government doesn't make a very good parent.

MPP is a critical tool to keep migrants safe — but it must be accompanied by consistent use and a consistent message enforcing the rule of law.

According to a 2020 report from Doctors Without Borders, over 57% of interviewed migrants and asylum seekers experienced some type of violence, including cases of assault, extortion, torture, and sexual assault. These crimes are devastating and directly result from the administration's misleading messaging that our nation's borders are open.

In my role, I have visited the border several times throughout my career and purposely several times during these last two years to see first-hand how the policies are impacting border security and the humanitarian crisis.

US Border Patrol made nearly 1.66 million arrests for unlawful crossings on the US-Mexico border during the fiscal year 2021, the highest annual number of apprehensions on record. As the number of migrants crossing increases, so does the number of criminals ready to exploit these vulnerable individuals.

Arizona encompasses two enormous, dangerous, geographically, politically, and economically complex CBP sectors, Tucson and Yuma. Here in Arizona, I hear from our law enforcement officials and community leaders every day as they recount the unfathomable number of apprehensions. Yet, across the Southwest border, we are seeing a record number of apprehensions, leading to an unknown number of getaways and migrants.

This last year, the Yuma Sector apprehended a Saudi immigrant with ties to a known terrorist organization.

Criminal organizations are smart. They are aware of the narrative and practice of federal policies and feed off of any perceived weak points. The art of misdirection and knowing when to fight your battles is not a secret held close. The Art of War is also a cautionary tale in these situations. TCOs know how to overwhelm the already exacerbated and preoccupied federal law

enforcement who diligently do their duties as directed by the Biden administration. TCOs know how to get dangerous drugs, personnel, and materials into and out of the US by using innocent migrants as distraction tactics during their dangerous operations.

In closing, Arizona has done and continues to do everything within our legal authority to provide law enforcement and communities with resources to help secure our border and protect our communities. Still, Arizona and our nation need the federal government to do its job and secure the nation's border.

This starts with ensuring common-sense policies like the Migrant Protection Protocols are enforced in a strong, consistent, and reliable fashion.

While border security is not a simple problem to solve, strong rhetoric, consistent policies, and lasting application of MPP is one action the Biden administration could take TODAY to protect Arizonans and Americans across the country.

I'd like to thank the brave men and women of law enforcement from CBP and all law enforcement on the front lines of the border that work tirelessly to protect our state and nation day and night. Their efforts are sincerely appreciated, and we must come together to do more from a policy and legislative perspective to support their efforts.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to speak to this distinguished committee on this important topic.