

Statement of Ranking Member Filemon Vela

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security Hearing

Border Security, Commerce and Travel: Commissioner McAleenan's Vision for the Future of CBP

April 25, 2018

My office and I receive daily notifications and press releases from CBP about the volume and value of the narcotics that are seized coming through our ports of entry. For example, CBP Officers at the Pharr Port of Entry seized 45 pounds of cocaine valued at more than \$347,000 earlier this month. At the Progreso International Bridge, CBP Officers seized nearly 20 pounds of crystal methamphetamine valued at more than \$381,000 in early April as well.

CBP publishes its enforcement statistics monthly, and I have noted that, over the past several years, more drugs are seized on average by the Office of Field Operations than Border Patrol. The only exception to that is marijuana, which Border Patrol interdicts at a much higher rate.

In addition to keeping people and contraband from entering illegally, CBP is also responsible for facilitating legitimate trade and travel – both of which are major drivers for economic growth. This means CBP officers inspect \$6.5 billion worth of cargo on a daily basis.

CBP officers are also responsible for screening and vetting foreign and U.S. citizen travelers headed to the United States, and at our international airports, cruise terminals, or land ports of entry. However, the fact that CBP continues to rely on temporary duty assignments and back-to-back shifts to make up for its officer shortage remains a major concern of mine.

I have stated on multiple occasions that CBP's officer staffing shortage and difficulty in retaining professional Border Patrol agents are self-inflicted vulnerabilities. These CBP staffing issues are critical to border security, yet the Administration continues to ignore these problems.

Commissioner, I introduced the Border and Port Security Act to give you the ability to hire more officers and agriculture specialists, but we need your commitment to address the internal problems that are making it difficult to onboard new personnel and keep them.

I am glad that my bill has bipartisan support, and I know that Chairwoman McSally has her own proposal to address CBP's officer staffing shortage.

My hope is that we can work on this issue in a bipartisan way, much like we did with the public-private partnership authority granted to CBP to address infrastructure needs at ports.

In my district, the City of Donna and CBP have been working to establish the Model Port concept, or the new way to streamline cargo and passenger vehicle inspections, through the Donation Acceptance Program. This project is an example of the many ways investments in our port infrastructure affects positive change along the border.

I hope that your confirmation gives you a greater ability to ensure the Administration uses the facts when considering changes to border security.