

**Statement of Ranking Member Filemon Vela**  
**Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security Hearing**

**“Looking North: Assessing the Current Threat at the US-Canada Border”**

**November 14, 2017**

With the launch of the 2011 *Beyond the Border Initiative*, Canada has been a critical partner in assisting the United States in stemming the flow of narcotics through our northern border as well as identifying and keeping out those individuals who pose a security risk. Nonetheless, I am concerned that over the last decade, resources have been disproportionately focused on the southwest border, at the expense of northern border.

This past June, the Department of Homeland Security issued a mandated report to Congress that assessed and identified emerging threats and capability gaps in the air, land, and maritime domains along our border with Canada. The findings of this report are not unlike what we often see along our southwest border. While, the scale of the threats is different, the nature of the threats is similar and the capability gaps identified are concerning.

As with our southwest border, the flow of narcotics between and at ports of entry along our northern border pose a significant public safety threat to our communities. As with our southwest border, transnational criminal organizations move significant amounts of narcotics in commercial cargo containers through ports of entry.

I have mentioned several times this Congress that CBP staffing shortfalls, such as not keeping an adequate number of CBP Officers at our ports of entry or assigning less Border Patrol Agents to northern sectors by a ratio of one to nine, exacerbate border security threats.

Similarly, as characterized by this report, the lack of situational and domain awareness due to insufficient investment in technology and infrastructure on our side of the northern border is deeply concerning. The capability gaps identified in this DHS report would in no way be acceptable or tolerable had they been found along our southwest border.

Last month, this Committee marked up and approved a flawed bill that would authorize billions of taxpayer dollars for a border wall along our southwest border. If we want DHS to continue to build up our border security, we have a responsibility to the American taxpayer to ensure the Department does so in way that truly and meaningfully maximizes our ability to mitigate risk – especially those risks that are well-known and documented.

I look forward to hearing from our DHS witnesses today about the trends in threats they have seen on the ground, and how we can better address and prevent the exploitation of our northern border by transnational criminal organizations and others who seek to do us harm.

I am pleased that we are joined today by Dr. Michael Marchand, Chairman of the Colville Business Council for Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. I believe that Dr. Marchand’s experience and the broader tribal perspective on challenges along our northern border will greatly add to our subcommittee’s understanding of what our tribal partners see as the way forward in terms of border security.

This past summer the National Congress of American Indians held a day-long summit, and more than 70 participants attended with representation from 19 tribal leaders from both the United States and Canada to discuss concerns at the United States-Canada border. I look forward to hearing more about this summit and discussing what participants identified as challenges and potential solutions.