



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Statement of Subcommittee Chairwoman Martha McSally (R-AZ) Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

“Looking North: Assessing the Current Threat at the U.S.-Canada Border”

November 14, 2017

Remarks as Prepared

When Congress talks about border security, it is usually in reference to the Southwest border. However, we cannot ignore the threats we face along the Northern border.

At almost 4,000 miles long, and a multitude of different terrains, our shared border with Canada is a situational awareness challenge that requires a much different strategy than that of the Southwest border.

To address these challenges, DHS needs to develop a coherent Northern border strategy and implementation plan to protect our northern frontier.

Last year Congressman John Katko led Congressional efforts to pass the Northern Border Threat Analysis Act. This legislation required DHS to focus its attention on national security threats that originate along our Northern border.

The Department finally released a threat analysis this past summer, with plans to release the full strategy in January of 2018, and an implementation plan to follow shortly thereafter.

Threats identified in the Northern border analysis include domestic Canadian terror plots and radicalized individuals attempting to enter the United States illegally. Similar to the southern border, transnational criminal organizations that control the bi-directional flow of illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin, fentanyl, ecstasy, and marijuana also pose a threat.

Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement are the law enforcement agencies tasked with securing the border and disrupting transnational criminal networks.

The report highlights the importance of CBP and ICE’s law enforcement partnerships with their Canadian counterparts, stressing the need for close cooperation and intelligence sharing to identify, track, prevent, and eventually interdict illicit cross-border activity.

The U.S. has long maintained a close working relationship with the Canadian government to fight terrorism. Recently, the Department has taken positive steps to ensure that appropriate national

security watchlists, such as the no-fly and selectee lists, are shared with Canadian law enforcement and that reciprocity is in place.

The threat analysis report also identifies significant gaps in our capabilities along the Northern border including insufficient amount of technology, personnel that makes achieving operational control and situational awareness nearly impossible.

Personnel shortfalls are no surprise to this Subcommittee. We are down almost 2,000 Border Patrol agents nationwide, and a similar number of CBP Officers. And on the Northern border we are 10% below the authorized level, despite the fact that the northern border is twice as long.

Surveillance technology shortfalls coupled with a less than fully staffed Border Patrol leads to a lack of operational control that is a major vulnerability at our Northern border. In fact, a 2010 GAO report found that the level of operational control along the Northern border was at less than TWO percent.

This is unacceptable.

We can only hope that in the last seven years, operational control has improved exponentially. If not, this is a huge problem.

Let me be clear, the bi-directional flow of drugs, specifically opioids like fentanyl and heroin, is the one of the greatest threats we face on the Northern border.

Fentanyl is now the leading cause of overdose deaths in the United States. These drugs, and their precursors, are being sourced from China and Mexico, trafficked over land through our international borders and showing up in neighborhoods all over the United States.

The Drug Enforcement Agency attributes the flood of illicit substances to smuggling routes that originate in Canada and pass through the Northern border.

CBP and ICE's priority must be to shut down these illicit pathways.

Drug seizures at and between ports of entry along the Northern border are significantly lower than the number of ICE-HSI drug seizures within the Northern border region. The numbers just don't add up. CBP must acquire the tools and staffing levels necessary to identify and interdict these harmful substances.

TCOs are active along our Northern border and have the ability and resources to move these drugs southbound into the United States. Even more concerning, a 2015 Special Investigation published by the Vancouver Sun reported that the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang controls many of Canada's largest ports.

If true, this is concerning given the ease in which drugs can be smuggled into Canada bound for the United States.

In order to stem the flow of illicit drugs along our Northern border, we must work with our partners to defeat transnational criminal organizations.

While the Northern Border Threat Analysis is the first step in addressing the threats along the Northern border, we expect the strategy and implementation plan to not only identify gaps but also take concrete steps to close them.

Thank you for being here to discuss the threats we face at our Northern border.

###