



**HOMELAND SECURITY
COMMITTEE**

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

“On the Line: Border Security from an Agent and Officer Perspective”

January 9, 2018

Remarks as Prepared

The Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security will come to order. The Subcommittee is meeting today to examine the challenges United States Border Patrol Agents and U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers face in carrying out their mission to secure the Nation’s border.

Before I begin, I would like to start with a moment of silence for Border Patrol Agent Rogelio Martinez, who was killed in the line of duty last year in Van Horn, Texas.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

Agents and Officers of U.S. Customs and Border Protection work every single day to secure our nation, often in rugged terrain, sometimes in very remote areas far away from the amenities of modern life. They are exposed to the blistering heat of the Arizona desert, and the brutal cold in places like Havre, Montana.

Working at the nation’s ports of entry, the men and women of CBP are the driving force behind our border security operations. The nation is fortunate that they are willing to endure hardship to make sure the border is secure.

Agents willingly take significant risks on every single shift to ensure that cartels cannot smuggle drugs and dangerous individuals across the border, or through our ports of entry with impunity.

It is dangerous work. Made more dangerous because agents are subject to frequent assaults – some of them have the potential to kill or cause grave bodily harm.

Just a few weeks ago, an agent in San Diego was patrolling the border on an all-terrain vehicle when he was struck in the chest by a grapefruit-sized rock causing him to lose control of his ATV, which subsequently rolled over on him.

Thankfully, the agent has been released from the hospital and will recover, but this type of assault is far from an anomaly. Many other agents have been seriously injured by sizeable rocks thrown over the fence.

On the screens to the left and right we have put up photographs of some of the gruesome injuries suffered by our brave agents during rock attacks.

Unfortunately, such assaults are becoming more commonplace in part because of the increase in the number of criminal aliens attempting to cross the border illegally who would rather resist arrest than face jail time for parole violations, or a felony reentry charge. More should be done to ensure that those who assault agents are held accountable and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

CBP has two key missions – securing the border and facilitating cross-border commerce that powers the nation's economic growth.

But in order to accomplish those missions, CBP needs enough agents and officers to be able to make arrests, interdict drug loads, screen cargo from countries of concern and move commerce and passengers through air, land and sea ports of entry.

U.S. Border Patrol Agents and CBP Officers are, at the end of the day, the most important border security and trade facilitation resource we have.

Unfortunately, they are in short supply these days, which has created a national security and economic vulnerability that this Congress must address. CBP is critically understaffed and remains well below its congressionally mandated staffing levels by more than 1,000 CBP Officers and 1,900 Border Patrol Agents.

The manpower shortage is getting worse.

We are losing ground every single month, and there is no end in sight as we continue to lose experienced agents and officers through attrition, without the ability to efficiently hire new ones.

The President has smartly called for the hiring of an additional 5,000 agents, but we have to ensure that CBP is set up for success to not only hire those additional agents in a timely fashion but also retain them in the future.

The U.S Border Patrol has not met its mandated hiring numbers since Fiscal Year 2014, and CBP has been losing officers since early in Fiscal Year 2016.

Several underlying issues are directly responsible for our current staffing woes.

For starters, it takes more than 292 days and 12 distinct steps, on average, to hire a new officer or agent. Very few people can wait somewhere between 6 months to a year for a job.

On top of that, CBP Officers and Agents are required to pass a polygraph examination, however the pass rates have not kept pace with the demand for more officers and agents.

Earlier this year the House passed my bill that would allow the Commissioner of CBP to waive the polygraph requirement for current state and local law enforcement officers who have already passed a polygraph examination, Federal law enforcement officers who have already passed a

stringent background investigation, and veterans with at least three consecutive years in the military who have held a security clearance and passed a background check.

These small changes will provide CBP with immediate relief so that they are able to quickly, yet judiciously, hire officers and agents from a pool of qualified applicants that already maintain the public's trust and put their lives on the line for our security and safety on a daily basis.

The challenges for our agents and officers are significant, which is why I have called this hearing today. I think it will benefit the Members of the Subcommittee to receive first-hand testimony from the line agents on the ground. I want to hear their perspective on what it will take to secure the border, listen to their first-hand views on hiring, retention and mobility challenges that have plagued CBP for the last few years, and finally discuss some solutions to the troubling and increasing trend of assaults on agents.

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