



NEWS



NEW: SOUTHWEST BORDER SECTOR CHIEFS CONFIRM TO HOUSE HOMELAND, OVERSIGHT COMMITTEES THAT MAYORKAS' CRISIS IS HISTORIC

November 26, 2023

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, House Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Mark E. Green, MD (R-TN) issued the following statement after the Committee released portions of transcribed interviews with U.S. Border Patrol chief patrol agents responsible for the sectors along the Southwest border.

"We spoke with some of the most senior and experienced leaders in the U.S. Border Patrol and they clearly recognize the unprecedented scope of this crisis. Their stunning testimony further informs the Committee's oversight work and emphasizes why we must hold Secretary Mayorkas and President Biden accountable for intentionally facilitating the worst border crisis in our history," Chairman Green said. "As the testimony of these leaders makes it clear, this is a policy-driven crisis, sparked almost overnight by an administration bent on ending effective border security policies and replacing them with mass catch-and-release. The numbers show the failure of that agenda. Make no mistake, I will not stand idly by as our men and women in green suffer the consequences of this administration's refusal to enforce the laws passed by Congress."

As part of the Committee's oversight investigation into Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and the unprecedented crisis at America's borders, the House Committee on Homeland Security and the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability conducted these interviews with eight chief patrol agents and one deputy chief patrol agent from May-September 2023 to acquire more information about operations in their sectors and how the crisis has impacted the safety and security of the United States.

The statements of several of these chief patrol agents make clear that the scope of the crisis that has taken place on Mayorkas' watch is something they have never before seen, and that they believe the number of encounters they have recorded is truly historic. On-the-record quotes are provided below.



Read more in the [New York Post](#).

Read sections of the transcripts below.

Then-Chief Patrol Agent Jason Owens, Del Rio Sector

Q: There have always been economic reasons for migrants to come over the southwest border, right?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And there has always been political instability in some of the central and southern American countries, right?

A: Yes.

Q: Have you, in all of your experience, ever seen the amount of people released as they are right now—released into the United States?

A: The United States? No.

Then-Chief Patrol Agent Jason Owens, Del Rio Sector

Q: Going back, so you're over capacity in these detention spaces. What are the encounter general trends that you've noticed that [sic]. You were at the academy in probably FY '21. But in this last FY, you've seen the trend, I assume. Can you explain a little bit more about what you've observed in terms of encounters at your sector?

A: Sure. So obviously we're very busy, and that seems to be—we're not the exception to the rule. And I can tell you that most of last year I think Del Rio Sector led the Nation day to day in terms of apprehensions. At the end of the fiscal year, we finished off FY '22 with just over 480,000 apprehensions and right around 200,000 known gotaways. That was the first year that we had surpassed the Rio Grande Valley Sector for the most apprehensions in the year.

The year before that, we had about 260,000 apprehensions, so it was a substantial increase from fiscal year '21. In fiscal year '21, it was busier than the previous 9 fiscal years combined for the Del Rio Sector.

So far this year, we're on pace to at least match what last year's numbers were. This year so far, it has been the Rio Grande Valley Sector, El Paso Sector, and Tucson Sector that have been, on a day-to-day basis, busier than we are. That's leading up to May 11th, and we don't know what's going to happen after that.

Then-Chief Patrol Agent Aaron Heitke, San Diego Sector

Q: Okay. Do you agree that the southern border is currently in crisis? And I should clarify this. Before I say "do you agree," I should have asked you, do you agree with Chief Ortiz, who testified in a deposition that he believes that the southern border is currently in crisis? Do you agree with Chief Ortiz's statement that the southern border is currently in crisis?

A: I'm not familiar with that exact testimony. And I would stick with San Diego as far as—I wouldn't want to speak to the entire southwest border. I have eyes on San Diego each and every day, and we have a lot of challenges in San Diego.

And without—San Diego is very busy, and we have an enormous amount of traffic there. As far as specific the—without going specific to his testimony, because I'm not exactly sure about it, but I would agree that San Diego, specifically, we have a lot of challenges there. And so yes.

Q: What types of challenges?

A: Enormous amounts of migrants coming across. Large groups that come in to give up right now, which takes an enormous amount of our resources.

Q: Well, Chief Ortiz in that same deposition was asked if there was—if he would agree that there was an unprecedented number of aliens illegally entering the United States, and he said yes. Would you agree with that testimony as well?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. He was also asked that—whether or not, when President Biden was elected, did the number of aliens trying to illegally enter the United States increase or decrease. He stated that it increased. Would you agree with that testimony as well?

A: Yes. Yep. Yeah. I'm sorry. Yes.

Q: He was also asked in that same deposition if the crisis that is currently ongoing at the southern border is making the border less safe for Americans and aliens alike. He answered in the affirmative that, yes, that crisis does make Americans and aliens more unsafe. Would you agree with that testimony?

A: Yes.

Then-Chief Patrol Agent Aaron Heitke, San Diego Sector

Q: Could policy decisions affect encounter numbers?

A: I guess an overall policy change—it's possible, yes.

Q: Have encounters increased in the past 2 years?

A: Yes.

Q: Have you ever seen encounters this high at the Southwest border?

A: No.

Deputy Chief Patrol Agent Dustin Caudle, Yuma Sector

Q: And so would you agree that periodic surges or spikes are not unprecedented at the southern border?

A: Certainly not unprecedented to see a surge or spike. The volume that we're seeing recently, in my opinion, in my career when I've seen is what I would consider unprecedented.

Chief Patrol Agent John Modlin, Tucson Sector

Q: And would you say that numbers tend to change with the seasons?

A: So, yes. In Tucson, absolutely, and even in other sectors where I worked, you know, like the holiday season, you know, the December time frame was a time when apprehensions tended to be very low. A lot of people that were crossing the border frequently illegally would cross into the United States, work for most of the year, and then go back into Mexico in December, and then come back in, say, January or February.

Tucson, because of the incredible amount of heat out there, the summer months tend to be very low. What's happening now that is unheard of, you know. I looked at 10 years of data to what the summer months should be, and, you know, so where we're at now in July, you know, should be about—we should have about 17,000 apprehensions in July, you know, given 10 years of data aggregated.

Instead we're at 26,000. So this time of year, the most dangerous time of year, is seeing one of the most significant flows that we've seen.

Chief Patrol Agent John Modlin, Tucson Sector

Q: So based on the data, and in large part the increases over the last few years are pretty significant, is it frustrating for you as the leader of the Tucson Sector when the encounters have kept increasing over a lengthy period of time?

A: So, yes, absolutely. I think, when I look at '18, '19, and '20, those years were about 60,000 people a year, more or less, within a thousand or two in either direction. And then '21 happened—or—yeah, '21 happened, and it jumped to 190,000. So it was three times the previous year, which was absolutely for us shocking in Tucson.

And then, thinking it couldn't go higher, it then went to 250,000 last year, and that did not include the 55,000 that we took from Yuma to help them out and the 170,000 gotaways recorded last year in that as well. And this year we're on pace to probably hit 300,000. So if that's the case, then we'll be five times what we did just in 2020. So that is significant.

As the leader, yes, it's troublesome, and I would say it is a little demoralizing, because, obviously, I try to do everything I can to support the men and women of Tucson Sector and to, most importantly, obviously, to achieve the securing the border, to keep the border as secure as I can.

And so when we see numbers like this, yes, that is—I don't remember, I'm sorry, the phrasing of the exact question, but the point is, yes, it is demoralizing to me as the leader of Tucson Sector to experience these numbers we're experiencing.

Chief Patrol Agent Sean McGoffin, Big Bend Sector

Q: Well, when you say what is happening, in your view and in your observation, given your three decades of experience in the Border Patrol, has there been a significant rise in these numbers, these encounters, drug seizures, got-aways?

A: Well, I don't have the comparative analysis to look at it, but in my understanding of everything, yes, there has been quite the rise across the board.

Chief Patrol Agent Sean McGoffin, Big Bend Sector

Q: Okay. So when the numbers of encounters increased by 127 percent from the time you got there in the first three months, you weren't expecting that to happen?

A: I mean, you can't sit there and say, like, there is going to be a surge in this particularized area, because the resources—I mean, the limitations in Big Bend Sector on both sides of the border are so different. There's no communities where people just suddenly show up into this area and say, "Hey, we're going to camp out here for 30 days," and we should know about it. It doesn't transpire in my AOR. They have to be moved there by smugglers deliberately to be able to cross.

And what I was looking at was the numbers being processed—or that were being—traversing through these vulnerable areas and why was it. These were remote areas for both sides of the border.

Q: So in those first three months, would you say that you were unprepared for that large increase in encounters?

A: I wouldn't say we were unprepared.

Q: You weren't expecting it, right?

A: I think we looked at it and said: Okay, what are we going to do? I mean, I wasn't expecting to see the numbers go like that. It never had happened before in the Big Bend Sector.

Chief Patrol Agent Gloria Chavez, Rio Grande Valley Sector

Q: In your 27 years of experience with Border Patrol, have you ever seen the number of encounters sustained for this long over the last 3 years?

A: No.

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Homeland Security Committee | Republican

U.S. House of Representatives
H2-176 Ford House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 226-8417

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