NEWS

"NOW NOBODY CROSSES WITHOUT PAYING:" SENIOR BORDER PATROL AGENTS DESCRIBE UNPRECEDENTED CARTEL CONTROL AT SOUTHWEST BORDER

January 12, 2022

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, House Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Mark E. Green, MD, PA-7 released a report based on the testimony of three senior Southwest Border Sector Border Patrol agents who collectively have served U.S. Border Patrol and Legacy Agencies responsible for the sector along the Southwest border. In the interviews, Border Patrol leadership confirmed the unprecedented influence the criminal cartels exert at the Southwest border, detailed the operational impacts of the Biden Administration's "Catch and Release" immigration policies, and described how Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas has ignored and dismissed the abuses and atrocities committed by these organizations against individuals seeking to get to the Southwest border.

"In these alarming interviews, senior Border Patrol agents not only shed a light on the unprecedented control exerted by the cartels at the Southwest border, but they also detailed how Secretary Mayorkas has ignored the dangerous consequences of his engagement. This means that the policies of Secretary Mayorkas have created ground-zero-up-to-border-line chaos and have created a dangerous and chaotic environment for individuals seeking to get to the Southwest border."

"From overwhelming Border Patrol agents who have spent years or even decades in the sector, the Committee has learned that the Biden Administration's policies have created a dangerous environment for both the American communities, all while allowing trafficking and jeopardizing all of vulnerable individuals. Secretary Mayorkas' refusal to enforce the law and enforce boundaries for illegal crossings is enabling the cartels' towering business model. The Administration's refusal to secure the Southwest Border is emboldening the cartels to continue their operations, allowing criminal cartels with no concern for human life or consideration of the rule of law to control the country."

The House Committee on Homeland Security and House Committee on Oversight and Accountability conducted interviews with three senior Border Patrol agents who collectively have served in the Rio Grande Valley Sector and have information about operations in the sector and the roles that the cartels have played in shaping and security of the Southwest Border. These interviews were part of the Committees' ongoing investigation into the causes, costs, and consequences of the Biden Administration's unprecedented crisis, and the cartel's influence in facilitating and exacerbating the crisis.

The interviews were part of an ongoing investigation by Homeland Security Chairman Mark E. Green, MD, PA-7 into the Biden Administration's dangerous and chaotic immigration policies. Chairman Green has repeatedly requested Department officials provide data and information on the impacts of current policy that has created a crisis. In February 2021, Border Patrol Chief Rodney Scott told Congress the cartels "control the border today. And they control the border because they have the people, they have the money, they have the weapons, they have the vehicles." In June, Texas Governor Greg Abbott told cartels to "stay out of Texas." The cartels are incredibly adept at changing their tactics, strategies, or they're pushing people through different parts of the border as different areas with different prices for different services. The cartels are controlling what's happening on the southern side of the United States government.

The cartels are also taking in historic profits from both drug and human smuggling, as well as human trafficking. In the interviews, senior agents noted that cartels were estimated to have made $13 billion in 2021 just off of human smuggling. Cartels are also using the chaotic environment created by the Biden Administration's policies to traffic drugs, force, have, many people crime at a time, all of that. All of it, all in controlled to—

Chief Patrol Agent John Modlin, Texas Sector:

For the Northeastern Cartel you earlier described as particularly violent—

Mr. O'Toole:

Mr. —would you say that they're also particularly cruel to the migrants?

Mr. Harold:

Why wouldn't they do they use in their smuggling process?

Mr. Harris:

Are partners, if you guys—the year without their permission—every section of law—is a crime that were their particular goal and they—if you guys—there without their permission, they will—that year or the job, with, they a cutaway, and they've been known to shoot people, you name it. That's how they—they rule through intimidation, as that's every criminal organization.

The other day, we had two people need up to six stones, and they had to identification on them, but we're dealing with—we're dealing with—we're dealing with—we're dealing with organizations. One of them is Gulf Cartel and the other one was Northeastern Cartel.

Do you often come across migrants that have experienced assaults, essentially, by the cartel?

Mr. Harris:

And you learn that through interviewing the migrants?

Mr. Harris:

Chief Patrol Agent Gregory Bovino, El Centro Sector:

Do you ever get individuals who cross on their own without the awareness of a transnational criminal organization, or is that uncommon?

Mr. Harris:

Do you ever have to interview migrants that have experienced sexual assaults, essentially, by the cartel?

Mr. Harris:

Chief Patrol Agent Gregory Bovino, El Centro Sector:

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Deputy Chief Patrol Agent Dustin Cobb, Texas Sector:

What are the TCOs in Mexico that are operating in the south Texas Sector?

We've all heard about Tren de Aragua. There's different factions. Some of the smaller local gangs, there are in particular that we've been dealing with for many years called the Mexican Mafia, the Chapitos, the Mayos, the Paisas. You know, there's the Sinaloa Cartel. There's the Jalisco Cartel. There's the Gulf Cartel. There's the Northeastern Cartel. There's the Zetas. There's the Gulf Cartel.

Do it—is your experience, as individuals who started to cross illegally would not do so without the connivance with someone affiliated with the TCOs?

Mr. That's correct.

If they tried to cross on their own, would there be consequences for that?

It's certainly possible, yes.

Chief Patrol Agent Aaron Heller, San Diego Sector:

Would it be difficult or is it unusual in Mexico, assume it was illegally to the San Diego Sector for them to do that without the awareness of a human smuggling organization or transnational criminal organization?

No. It would be difficult and dangerous.

Would it be—

The organizations that can—those lines get paid for many years and have proven that crossed in that area. So they are afforded a payment for everything that goes through, and they don't want to lose that payment. And so we have run into situations where we've had people, related or known about they've tried to make it through without connecting to one of the people in charge of that area.

Do you know how much an individual would pay a transnational criminal organization to be smuggled into the United States in the San Diego Sector?

No. We have ballpark numbers.

Is it—is it—is it—

It varies. And I think the easiest—it's a business model that they use.

So on-set, right now, to cross on our 60 miles of land border, on average it costs about $8,000 per person. It's between $5,000 and $12,000 depending—

On the areas. I'm generally between $10,000 and $20,000 per person.

They also offer better ways to smuggle. So if they have a large group of 200 or 300 people, sometimes they will only have to pay $500 or $800 per person because it's quicker and it's easier for them to move those folks in places.

Do you have any information on how much money the cartels make off of human smuggling organizations. You first said you said you've got a ballpark and you've got a ballpark, but you've been dealing with this for many years. Do you have any ballpark numbers that you've got, that you've—

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A: Yes.

Q: Do you know whether the number of rescues performed by Border Patrol agents in El Paso, do you know what those trends are? Have they been increasing or decreasing over the years?

A: They've been increasing over the years for rescues.

Q: What types of rescues do Border Patrol agents perform in El Paso?

A: There's not a lot of water in El Paso; however, there are seasons when we have large currents in waterways. And so smugglers will tell them to swim across, the migrant to swim across, but the actual design of the canal is to suck debris through, and so there's this large current that kind of sucks people in. And so there's water rescues there where people are drowning from that.

Smugglers will have people climb up a ladder on the south side, and then they'll pull the ladder away, and sometimes you're talking about 30-foot fence, sometimes 18-foot fence, and then they'll make them scale down on their own because they're stuck up on top of the fence.

And then they'll—smugglers will take groups of migrants through the desert, and temperatures are extremely hot in the area, in the desert. And if the migrant can't keep up with the smuggler, then the smuggler just leaves them behind. And so there's rescues there. There's also deaths there if we can't get there soon enough to make a rescue.

There is also—we talked about load vehicles. Some of those are people that are put into trunks of vehicles, that are put into the back of box trucks, hidden compartments, those kinds of things. And when you compile that with the extreme heat or vehicle accidents, many times we've rescued people from those situations.

Q: And you mentioned that deaths have also resulted as a result of these smuggling tactics.

A: Yes.

Chief Patrol Agent Joel Martinez, Laredo Sector

Q: What about the river rescues, have those increased?

A: They do, especially after a good hard rain where the river rises a little bit. And—

Q: Are those rescues a result of circumstances or do the transnational criminal organizations ever put migrants in peril intentionally as a tactic to divert resources?

A: Both.

Q: You've seen both—

A: I've seen both.

Q: —in the Laredo Sector?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do those rescues put agents at risk of harm?

A: Yes.

Chief Patrol Agent Gloria Chavez, Rio Grande Valley Sector

Q: What about rescues, what are the trends that you're seeing currently in—with regard to Border Patrol agents having to rescue individuals who are in peril?

A: So agents are every day out there on patrol and, for the most part, are, you know, encountering a lot of these migrants that are, especially with the weather, dehydrated. They are found in remote areas, different ranches out there. And they're rescuing people every day.

When it comes to either families or single adults, just this morning I was informed of a 2-month-old infant that was abandoned at the border and rescued by agents this morning in the Rio Grande City Station. So rescues are happening every day by our agents.

Q: Do those rescues ever put agents in harm's way?

A: It does. Our agents constantly are risking their own lives to save other human lives. And I'm very, very proud of the actions that they do every day, but it is a concern and a risk because they're in areas that are very remote, and many times their own life is at peril.

Chief Patrol Agent Gloria Chavez, Rio Grande Valley Sector

Q: Do you know of aliens that ever go into debt to pay for the cartel to come into the United States?

A: I have heard from different debriefs from our intelligence agents that many of the migrants that do hire human smugglers at times haven't even paid their debt yet until they get find a job in the United States to pay that debt. I have heard that from different briefs.

Deputy Chief Patrol Agent Dustin Caudle, Yuma Sector

Q: And how do the cartels treat aliens when they smuggle them?

A: As a commodity, a number.

Chief Patrol Agent Sean McGoffin, Big Bend Sector

Q: Can you expand on what this anti-smuggling campaign is doing?

A: Well, simply, we're trying to identify more people that are being smuggled and engage in greater populations of prosecutions. You know, as I've said many times and in here as well—you know what I mean?—these people are treated poorly by those who choose to exploit them, take their money, their life savings oftentimes, and, you know, try to bring them into the country.

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