

U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
“Perspectives from the DHS Frontline: Evaluating Staffing Resources and Requirements”

March 22, 2017

Ranking Member Claire McCaskill

Opening Statement

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for calling this hearing today to talk about this critical issue.

I want to start by thanking Border Patrol agents, Customs and Border Protection—or “CBP”—officers, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement—or “ICE”—personnel. I know that your jobs are not easy and not always appreciated.

In February, I went to see our southern border firsthand, and met some of the men and women tasked with our safety and security. I talked to these hardworking Border Patrol agents, CBP officers, ICE agents and Air and Marine personnel and I heard about the challenges that they face. Every day, these men and women have to secure a border that spans deserts, rivers and mountains, they have to process hundreds of thousands of people, cargo, and vehicles coming into our country, and they have to go toe to toe with cartels, who will stop at nothing to smuggle drugs and—for what is becoming even more obscenely profitable for them—people into this country. These men and women are understaffed, overworked, and seldom

receive the recognition they deserve. Ensuring that the men and women responsible for protecting our border and enforcing our immigration laws have the resources they need is an issue of national security.

When I was at the southern border I asked these men and women what they needed to do their jobs better. Was it resources? Was it technology? Was it additional staff? And yes, I asked if we needed a wall. And you know what they said? They said that they needed better roads to access the border, they needed double fencing in some areas that experience high traffic, they needed more electricity to power their equipment in remote locations, and they needed more agents to help ease some of the overtime. But not one said we needed a 2,000 mile long border wall, and not one said that a wall by itself could secure the border.

We need to think carefully about these men and women and what we can do to help them do their jobs and keep us safe. We should give them more resources, we should give them more roads, and yes we should give them more staff, but we shouldn't just go and build a wall without thinking about it first. These people know firsthand what we need, and they should be listened to.

As everyone here knows, the President has signed executive orders calling for an additional 5,000 border patrol officers and an additional 10,000 ICE agents. And let me just say, that I am for giving these agencies the staff they need, but did

anyone stop and think before the President decided that an additional 15,000 agents alone was the answer? What about 14,000? Or 16,000?

If the President's goal is to increase the number of apprehensions of people crossing the border illegally, simply increasing the number of Border Patrol Agents may not be the most effective strategy. In fact, since 2000, the number of Border Patrol agents has increased by 115%, while the number of apprehensions along the southern border by those Border Patrol agents has decreased by 75%.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that I am going to sound like a broken record on this point, but I would like to see the cost-benefit analysis. Did anyone take the time to calculate how many people we need to do the job right? Right now we have management problems in CBP and ICE where agents are stuck behind desks doing administrative tasks, and the manager to officer ratio needs review. Do we need an additional 15,000 agents, or do we need a shift in structure, or more support staff so that agents can be out there doing their jobs? These are the questions we need to answer.

The other glaring problem with this rush to hire an additional 15,000 agents is that the administration has completely overlooked our ports of entry. Yes, that's right, according to these executive orders not one additional person will be added to the CBP officer ranks. CBP officers serve a critical role screening cargo and

visitors at more than 300 ports of entry. In 2015, CBP collected \$46 billion from duties, taxes and fees at ports of entry across the country. That same year CBP officers arrested 8,246 individuals wanted for serious crimes and seized more than 3.3 million pounds of narcotics at points of entry. Despite this their critical role in securing our border, and the fact that they are understaffed based on CBP's own models, the administration plans to do nothing to ease the burden on them.

I'd like to ask the administration why it made that decision. I'd like to ask the administration how long it will take to hire its new officers and agents. I'd like to know how they plan to use them around the country...but they are simply not here to answer our questions.

Unfortunately, this is the second hearing in a row where, when given an invitation, the administration has failed to provide a witness. I invited the Department to send anyone—anyone!—to testify at today's hearing, and DHS has failed to provide a single representative. The lack of responsiveness by DHS to this Committee is incredibly troubling. I know the Department has already begun issuing acquisition requests to contractors for the President's proposed border wall, yet I am still waiting for information from the Department on the cost-benefit analysis they are supposedly conducting. I refuse to accept that stonewalling is the new normal.

During the past two months the Trump administration has proposed huge changes would impact our budget, our policies, and our national security, but they have shown an unwillingness to answer any questions about them. Our system of government works because there is oversight; because we have checks and balances.

I want to make sure that the CBP and ICE officers and agents out there securing the border, manning our ports of entry, and enforcing our laws have the resources that they need and deserve. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about those needs and how we can work to meet them. And after this hearing is done, I will continue to ask the administration questions, and believe me I plan to get answers.