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Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Peters, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is currently experiencing an unprecedented and unsustainable situation at the southwest border. In fact, it is nothing short of a border security and humanitarian crisis.

Each day, we see the cascading effects of mass migration both at and between our ports of entry. The vast majority are Central American families and unaccompanied alien children (UAC). The increased shift to these more vulnerable populations, combined with overwhelming numbers, profoundly impacts our ability to patrol the border, diminishing our ability to deter deadly narcotics and dangerous people from entering our country. Inadequate detention capacity and overwhelmed U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) resources greatly contributes to this crisis.

The current migration patterns have reaped huge profits for the transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) that use smuggling as a cash flow source. This has caused a significant human toll on some of the world's most vulnerable populations, further exacerbating the implications of already stretched resources.

Today's testimony is an account of what the men and women of CBP are seeing and experiencing on the frontlines of our nation every day. We appreciate the opportunity to share their perspective with you.

A Dangerous Journey

The journey from Central America through Mexico to the southern border of the United States is a dangerous one. From unscrupulous human smugglers and dangerous methods of travel to harsh environmental conditions, the perils that migrants face are very real.

Every year, Border Patrol agents save thousands of people who are overcome by the conditions on their journey, including those suffering from dehydration, heat stroke, starvation, or hypothermia. Our agents save people who are drowning in rivers, abandoned in deserts, or staged in inhumane stash houses. They also find those who have been sexually assaulted, and others who are left for dead by smugglers intent on the profit of delivering the larger group—at the cost of someone's life. In total, Border Patrol agents rescued more than 4,300 individuals in FY 2018, and rescued nearly 850 in just the first four months of FY 2019.

Desperate migrants often pay human smuggling groups thousands of dollars to aid them on their journey. Smugglers and traffickers profit from human misery by exploiting people who are seeking a better life. They deceive desperate people about our country's laws, while also abusing and exploiting them on their journey north. These smugglers, many with ties to TCOs, often deprive migrants of food and water, physically assault them, and place them in inhumane traveling conditions, such as locking them in tractor-trailers while outside temperatures can reach in excess of 115 degrees. Still other migrants are transitioned into trafficking or used as drug

mules. Human smugglers have no regard for the health and safety of the migrants on whom they prey, and who pay them. As a result, many who make the journey become sick, injured, or traumatized. Some even lose their lives.

Many migrants travel north from countries where poverty and disease are rampant, and their health can be aggravated by the physical toll of the journey. In many cases, they arrive at our southern border already exhibiting symptoms of a health issue. Those we encounter may have never seen a doctor, received immunizations, or lived in sanitary conditions. Close quarters on trains and buses that smugglers procure for moving them through Mexico can hasten the spread of communicable diseases. All of these factors leave migrants vulnerable to serious medical complications.

Situation at the Southwest Border

In the first five months of FY 2019—through the end of February—CBP encountered an average of more than 60,000 migrants per month crossing illegally and presenting at ports of entry without proper documents. In February alone, we encountered more than 76,000 migrants, 87 percent of whom were apprehended while illegally crossing the border.

Although not even half the fiscal year has passed, the U.S. Border Patrol has apprehended more people crossing illegally than in all of FY 2017. In March alone, the projected number of total apprehensions and inadmissible aliens will likely reach 100,000. By the end of March, the first six months of FY 2019 will exceed four of the last ten fiscal year totals.

One trend we are seeing is an increase in the number of family units arriving at our border. More than half of those crossing the U.S. southern border are members of family units. In fact, the Border Patrol has already apprehended more families illegally crossing in the first five months of FY 2019 than during all of FY 2018, eclipsing last year's record total by almost 30,000 with seven months still to go until the end of the year. In February, we apprehended over 36,000 individual family unit members, a 560 percent increase over the same month in FY 2018.

At the same time, apprehensions and encounters of UAC have increased 37 percent over this time last year, exceeding 7,000 in February. We are on pace for more than 27,000 children, both with parents and unaccompanied, to enter our immigration enforcement process in the month of April. Approximately one-fifth of them are under five years of age.

The second trend is that CBP apprehensions of Mexican migrants remain at historically low levels, while the majority of illegal migrants now originate from the three countries of Central America known as the Northern Triangle: Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The number of Northern Triangle migrants exceeded the number of Mexican migrants in four of the past five fiscal years and has reached a total of more than 64 percent of crossings thus far this fiscal year. Unlike single adult migrants from Mexico, UACs or families from Central America cannot be swiftly repatriated.

The third major trend is the dramatic increase in claims of a fear of return to a migrant's country of origin. Between 2000 and 2013, less than one percent of those apprehended or encountered at our border claimed a fear of return. In FY 2018, a record level of more than 38,000 people claimed a fear of return—a 120 percent increase over FY 2017. In FY 2019, we have almost reached that total in the first five months alone, with an almost 90 percent increase in fear of return over FY 2018. Central American families are coming to our border and claiming fear of return because they know that DHS must release them within 20 days under court order, and that they will be allowed to stay in the U.S. indefinitely while awaiting immigration court proceedings.

Exacerbating these challenges, the U.S. Border Patrol is now apprehending larger and larger groups between ports of entry; more than 90 groups of migrants each comprising over 100 members (primarily Guatemalan and Honduran families) have been apprehended in remote areas of the border so far this fiscal year. The largest of these groups included 334 migrants who arrived in the boot heel of New Mexico, 94 miles from the nearest Border Patrol Station. Human smugglers are now presenting diversified offerings to potential prospective migrants, including an “express” route of five- to seven-day days from western Guatemala to the U.S. border.

Human smugglers strategically choose the timing and location for these large group crossings in order to disrupt U.S. border security efforts, create a diversion for smuggling of narcotics, and allow single adults seeking to evade capture an opportunity to cross unnoticed. Even worse, these smugglers bring horrible violence, sexual assault, and extortion on some of the most vulnerable people in our hemisphere.

Since October 2018, CBP has seen an increase in migrants' use of caravans to make the journey north towards the United States. DHS defines a migrant caravan as “an autonomous group of 300 or more individuals organized in advance by non-state actors that travels in a coordinated manner, migrating from one country to another often times, though not exclusivity, in violation of a given country's national immigration laws and policies, with some members (or organizers) having the ancillary goals of advocating a political position and/or bringing media attention to social or political issues.”

Traveling with a caravan is appealing to some migrants because they perceive it provides a safer journey and avoids the thousands of dollars in costs associated with traveling with a human smuggler. The phenomenon of large organized groups transiting Mexico has successfully accelerated migrants' timelines to reach the border by utilizing transportation services provided by state and local governments assisting in moving migrants throughout Mexico. Although caravans receive a lot of media attention, they represent only a tiny fraction of the overall illegal migration volume to the southwest border.

Given the modified routes and awareness of the likelihood of release into to the United States if migrants arrive as a family unit, we are seeing more families arriving with young children, and more cases of ill children arriving at the border. While the men and women of CBP pride themselves on providing appropriate care for those in its custody, the volume of family units, the unique care and custody requirements presented by these increasing numbers, the demographics

of those crossing, and the increase in medical issues, has caused CBP to consider the use and expansion of urgent and sustained interagency support to safely and appropriately process migrants. CBP continues to work with its interagency partners to identify options to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of migrants.

The border security and humanitarian crisis at the southwest border continues to present significant operational challenges to CBP, and current trends indicate that it will worsen as we enter the warmer spring months.

The Border Patrol has reallocated agents and other logistical resources to fulfill processing, detention, and humanitarian needs as agents confront the continuous flow of families and unaccompanied children into the United States. We are committed to effectively using our resources to support border security operations and the ongoing humanitarian efforts. CBP generally holds populations such as families and UAC apart from single adults for their safety and wellbeing. However, the influx of family units has led to CBP facilities operating at capacities they were not designed for.

Centralized Processing Center

In the El Paso Sector alone, we have seen a 434 percent increase in apprehensions this fiscal year, exacerbating capacity constraints in our facilities.

To address this influx, CBP is currently taking steps to establish a Centralized Processing Center (CPC) in the El Paso Sector. This will help us protect the health and safety of those in custody while streamlining operations and reducing time in custody. The El Paso CPC, modeled in part on the CPC established in 2014 in the Rio Grande Valley Sector, will provide a centralized location for the processing of migrants, and will facilitate consistent medical assessments in a centralized location before DHS transfers UACs to shelters funded by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Office of Refugee Resettlement, and single adults and family units to ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO).

CBP's Response to the Crisis

CBP is addressing this border security and humanitarian crisis with all available resources. A key component of our strategy is deterring illegal entry, and we are putting the initial investments in the border wall system to good use. Ninety-three percent of FY 2017-funded border wall replacement projects—approximately 37 miles—were completed by February 15, 2019. An additional \$1 billion in FY 2018-funded construction contracts were awarded in February 2019.

The installation of a modern barrier in key border areas has made an immediate impact. A two-mile stretch of border immediately west of the Calexico West Port of Entry in Border Patrol's El Centro Sector in California, has been a consistent hot spot for illegal activity. The presence of local pedestrian and vehicle traffic from a shopping center just steps away from the border allowed illegal border crossers to quickly vanish into the United States. Since construction of

approximately two miles of new steel bollard border wall and the installation of cameras and sensors, agents have been better able to deter individuals from crossing illegally into the U.S. in this location. Additionally, the steel bollard design has increased agents' safety by allowing them to maintain a full line of sight through the barrier.

In El Paso, Texas, CBP replaced 20 miles of vehicle barrier with pedestrian barrier, giving Border Patrol agents new capabilities to deter illegal border crossers. Government construction projects usually take two years or more to begin. In contrast, construction on border fencing projects began within months, in response to the urgent operational need. These projects are nearly complete and are expected to be delivered on time and within budget.

In FY 2019, we received funding for additional primary pedestrian fencing in the Rio Grande Valley Sector. We also received \$100 million for border surveillance technology, including fixed towers, remote video surveillance systems, mobile surveillance capability systems, and innovative towers. These investments assist Border Patrol agents in the field, as they increase CBP's ability to detect illegal activity along the border, increase our operational capabilities, and improve the safety of frontline law enforcement personnel. We will aggressively implement the security enhancements supported by these investments, and deploy capabilities consistent with the requirements of our agents on the ground.

We have also taken measures to expand our capacity to care for the historic influx of migrants. On December 25, 2018, Commissioner McAleenan directed CBP to oversee same-day secondary medical reviews of all children who were in Border Patrol custody by contract medical professionals or Border Patrol agents and CBP officers trained as EMTs or paramedics.

On January 28, 2019, the Commissioner issued an additional directive to guide CBP's deployment of enhanced medical evaluations for individuals in CBP custody along the southwest border.

CBP requested and received medical field support from the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. Those teams deployed to the Yuma, Tucson, and El Paso Sectors and have increased capacity to perform pediatric medical checks. We are also expanding the use of contracted medical personnel to perform medical screening and triage in areas of the southwest border where we are experiencing the highest volume of UAC and family unit apprehensions.

We have worked with ICE regarding any available surge options for transportation to Family Residential Centers and/or supervised release. We are also reviewing all appropriate options to relieve recent crowding in Border Patrol stations and checkpoints, including engaging with non-governmental organizations and local partners.

We are also coordinating with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to gather data on infectious diseases among migrants in custody, and develop recommendations for further CBP action. We are seeking advice from external medical experts, including the American Pediatric Association and others.

Conditions at the Ports of Entry

CBP officers at our nation's POEs focus on four priority missions: national security; counter-narcotics, economic security, and the facilitation of legitimate trade and travel.

The operational capacity at a POE varies depending on overall port volume, facility capacity, resource constraints, and daily tactical and enforcement activities. Operational impact at POEs cannot always be planned; for example, we do not know in advance when we will discover human, narcotics, or weapons smuggling attempts, or which individuals may present a threat to our officers. It takes significant resources to manage this highly variable environment.

Similar to what we see between POEs, we are seeing increased numbers of migrants, including family units and other aliens who arrive without proper documents, many of whom claim a fear of return. Large groups of inadmissible aliens, sometimes in the hundreds, arriving at POEs strain our processes and divert our officers from their priority missions, as those migrants need to be processed in a humane and efficient manner.

Our short-term holding facilities at POEs were neither designed for the large volume of inadmissible persons nor the long-term custody of individuals awaiting transfer to ICE/ERO detention facilities. We consider 4,000 detainees to be a high number of migrants in custody, and consider 6,000 detainees to be at a crisis level. On March 27, 2019, CBP had more than an unprecedented 13,000 detainees in custody.

CBP officers are committed to our multifaceted national security and legitimate trade and travel mission sets. The processing of inadmissible aliens is only one aspect of our many missions. CBP's Office of Field Operations (OFO) processes all persons who apply for admission at POEs and does not turn away anyone who is seeking asylum. At times, due to operational capacity or as necessary to facilitate orderly processing and maintain the security and safety of the traveling public, individuals may need to wait in Mexico before being permitted to enter the POE.

To confront the unprecedented humanitarian and border security crisis on the southwest border, CBP is temporarily re-assigning CBP officers from several POEs to Border Patrol Sectors. These officers will be deployed from the San Diego, Tucson, El Paso, and Laredo Field Offices' areas of responsibility, which will impact CBP's ability to process trade and travel at those locations. CBP officers will support Border Patrol Sectors with care and custody responsibilities, including hospital watch and transportation. We are working closely with the trade community, local authorities, and other partners to mitigate the impact of reduced staffing at the southwest border ports.

Narcotics

Illegal drugs continue to flow into the United States at POEs in the air, land, and sea environments. CBP has a unique responsibility and a critical role in preventing illicit narcotics, including opioids, from entering our country. CBP, with the support of Congress, has made significant investments in, and improvements to, drug detection and interdiction technology and

targeting capabilities at and in between our POEs. For example, CBP was the first agency in the nation to successfully train and utilize canines in the detection of fentanyl, and is a trendsetter in the use and development of non-intrusive inspection (NII) capabilities.

Marijuana continues to account for the bulk of contraband drugs CBP seized by weight. However, that amount has been on a downward trajectory in the past few years. As we have observed a decline in the amounts of marijuana seized at POEs, interdictions of harder, more profitable, and more dangerous drugs are holding steady or increasing. At the end of FY 2018, we saw increases in the amounts of methamphetamine and heroin; cocaine is currently trending upwards in FY 2019.

To counter this, CBP has deployed additional chemical field screening equipment with the ability to presumptively identify more than 14,000 substances, and all OFO concealed human and narcotic detection canine teams across the operational environment have completed training to detect fentanyl and fentanyl analogues.

We use advanced detection equipment and technology, including NII equipment and radiation detection technologies, to maintain robust cargo, commercial conveyance, and vehicle inspection regimes at our POEs. NII technologies deployed to our land, sea, and air POEs include large-scale X-ray and gamma-ray imaging systems, as well as a variety of portable and handheld technologies. NII systems enable CBP officers to examine cargo conveyances such as shipping containers, commercial trucks, and rail cars, as well as privately owned vehicles, for the presence of contraband without physically opening or unloading them.

For FY 2019, CBP has received \$564 million for NII at land POEs. This is a historic investment that will allow CBP to transform its efforts to stop illicit drugs from entering the country through legal crossing points. Combined with \$76.9 million for personnel, lab equipment, canine units, and POE technologies to support countermeasures against opioid trafficking, CBP will be able to increase the number of vehicles crossing our borders that are scanned with cutting edge technology, and develop the forensic capabilities necessary to ensure prosecution and criminal sanctions. CBP appreciates the support of Congress for these critically-needed capabilities.

While most of the focus of this testimony has been our in-bound mission, our outbound mission to stem the outbound flow of firearms, currency, stolen vehicles, and fugitives departing the country is equally critical. In many cases, our efforts prevent cartels south of our border from receiving funds, weapons and support. In cargo, our outbound role includes preventing terrorist groups, rogue nations, and other criminal organizations from obtaining U.S. Munitions List (USML) and Commerce Control List (CCL) commodities; and enforcing sanctions and trade embargoes while increasing export compliance.

Conclusion

CBP has four priority missions: national security; counter-narcotics, economic security, and the facilitation of legitimate trade and travel. While we are the largest agency in the immigration

process, we are only the first step—and processing migrants is only a fraction of the CBP mission, albeit one we take extremely seriously.

We have dedicated every available resource to stop the flow of illegal migrants and dangerous drugs into the United States, including personnel, technology, and innovating outreach and engagement with international and non-governmental industry partners. However, despite our efforts, the system is overwhelmed. The nation is facing a full-blown security and humanitarian crisis along our southwest border. We need Congress to acknowledge the crisis and help us by taking legislative action in support of CBP and our partners.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to your questions.