



National Border Patrol Council

Testimony of Dean Mandel

On behalf of the

National Border Patrol Council

In front of United States Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

February 2016

Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Carper, thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Border Patrol Council (NBPC).

The NBPC represents the interests of 16,500 line Agents at the Border Patrol and my name is Dean Mandel. I am an active duty Border Patrol Agent assigned to the Buffalo Sector. I joined the Border Patrol in 2006 after having served in the U.S. Navy for 4 years.

Canadian Border

We live in a highly connective world and the tragedy in Paris is unfortunately an example of where one country's policies can impact their neighbors. As someone stationed on the Northern Border I want to be clear, what happens in Canada matters to the United States. Whether it be Canadian policies toward refugees or immigration, their decisions impact U.S. security given the size and nature of our shared border.

I started my career at the Southern border in Nogales, Arizona. In Nogales, we had air support, fencing, cameras, and a solid network of ground sensors. Although we never had sufficient manpower, in an emergency you almost always had backup.

On the Northern border it is entirely different. Of the 21,000 Agents in the Border Patrol only 2,100 are assigned to the Northern border. When you take into account supervisors who are not in the field, annual leave, sick leave, days off, training days, and the fact we work a three shift rotation, we only have about 300 Agents guarding the entire Northern border at any one time. I would assess that there are approximately as many Capitol Police on duty right now protecting the Capitol complex as we have on the entire 4,000 mile Northern Border

On the Southern border, we have one Agent for every linear mile. Each of these Agents is made more effective by the entire infrastructure of fencing, cameras, air support, and sensors. On the Northern border, we have one agent for every 13.5 miles and we have much less of this infrastructure. On the Southern border, if you ask an Agent, they will probably tell you we are at best 40 percent effective in apprehending illegal aliens and drug smugglers. On the Northern border, I would estimate the effectiveness rate is fraction of this figure.

Canadian Immigration, Refugee and Visa Policy

I know that there is a significant controversy regarding Canada's recent decision to admit 25,000 Syrian refugees. In my opinion, it is very difficult to gage the risk posed by these refugees and much of the risk will depend on the screening process utilized by the Canadians.

Candidly of greater concern to me from a border security perspective, are the over 5 million foreign visitors that enter Canada annually. Canada is a diverse nation and with a per capita Muslim population three times our own. As a result, they have major inflows from tourist and business travelers from throughout the Middle East.

Canada has a visa waiver system similar to ours with 51 countries. The visa waiver system is a huge security gap because it is operated under the assumption that if you were, for example, from France that you posed no security risk. Given the number of terrorist cells uncovered in Europe alone this assessment of risk was completely false.

Starting in March Canada will require visa waiver travelers to obtain an Electronic Travel Authorization before being admitted. This is an important first step toward closing this security gap and will decrease our vulnerability. However, database checks are only as effective as the database itself. As we saw in San Bernardino, many terrorists simply are not on law enforcement's or the intelligence community's radar.

For visitors from non-visa waiver countries, Canada again has a similar system as ours. Applicants are required to submit photos, proof of financial support, a return ticket and a police certificate from their country of residence. Although Canada takes its immigration laws seriously, like the U.S. it also lacks a comprehensive visa tracking system that ensures that individuals leave the country.

Finally, there is the issue of homegrown terrorism. Unfortunately, no country, including Canada and the United States, is immune from this threat. Given that Canadian citizens do not require a visa for visits less than 90 days, we are relying heavily on Canadian law enforcement and intelligence agencies to identify potential threats.

Conclusion

Canada is a valued partner when it comes to border security. Personally, I wish we had such a partner on our Southern border. However, we have failed to properly invest in our Northern border. As a result we are gambling that Canadian law enforcement and intelligence effectively uncovers domestic terror cells and screens over 5 million visitors annually for threats. As an American, the idea that we would rely so heavily on a foreign government, even one as friendly, professional and competent as Canada, concerns me.

Please remember that Paris attackers organized their operation in Belgium right under the noses of the Belgium Security Services. They were able to do this because the Belgium Security Service had been underfunded for years despite the fact it was open knowledge that on a per capita basis Belgium supplied more foreign fighters to ISIS than any other European Union country.

Northern Border Patrol Agents apprehend over 3,000 individuals annually. Given that we only have 300 Agents per shift covering almost 4,000 miles of the border, I think we are doing a good job with what we have.

The problem is that we simply do not have enough manpower. We have more Agents in El Paso than we have on our entire Northern border. The NBPC believes that the current force level of 2,100 Agents needs to be augmented by another 1,500 Agents on our Northern border. This additional manpower will help to decrease our almost complete reliance on Canadian law enforcement and intelligence agencies for our security.

Thank you again and I look forward to answering any questions that you might have.