



Testimony
of

Rodney S. Scott
Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

before the

U.S. Senate Committee on
Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs

on

“Oversight of the Department of Homeland Security: ICE, CBP, and USCIS”

February 12, 2026
Washington, DC

Introduction

Chairman Paul, Ranking Member Peters, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) immigration enforcement and border security operations.

I am honored to represent the more than 67,000 dedicated men and women of CBP — the largest law enforcement agency in the United States. We stand watch on the front lines of our country's borders to protect the American people from external threats while facilitating lawful trade and travel, often under difficult conditions and intense public scrutiny, but always in service to the Nation. It is a privilege to join my colleagues from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Together, our agencies work in close partnership to secure our homeland and uphold the integrity of our border.

The Human Cost of Failed Policy

The past year has been one of the most consequential in the history of America's border security. Under the decisive leadership of President Donald J. Trump, Secretary Kristi Noem, and Border Czar Tom Homan, and thanks to the tireless efforts of the thousands of dedicated public servants who work at our agencies to ensure border security, CBP has fundamentally reversed years of open-border policies, achieving record-low illegal entries between ports of entry. These results reflect a clear commitment to restoring the rule of law, prioritizing the safety of the American people, and empowering our officers and agents to fulfill their critical mission.

CBP spent the last year rebuilding a devastated border defined by record encounters, overwhelmed facilities, inadequate deterrence measures, and personnel stretched to the limit. We must be unflinchingly honest about the humanitarian catastrophe that defined the previous Administration's open border policies. The same critics attacking us today for enforcing the law were silent for four years as open borders empowered cartels to engage in industrial-scale human trafficking. Nowhere was this failure more tragic than in the treatment of Unaccompanied Alien Children (UACs).

A bombshell report from the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) in August 2024 exposed the depth of this betrayal of UACs. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, CBP encountered over 500,000 unaccompanied children at the Southwest border. Investigators revealed that the government on President Biden's watch had effectively lost track of hundreds of thousands of these children, in an utter failure to ensure their safety and well-being.

The details are damning. The DHS OIG found that more than 291,000 children — out of nearly 450,000 transferred to the Department of Health and Human Services' custody — were never even issued Notices to Appear in court, and many who were served notices missed their court dates. By failing to initiate removal proceedings or determine the whereabouts of those UACs who did not appear, the previous Administration made ghosts of these children, denying them any meaningful legal or physical protection. The prior Administration released these children into the interior of our country with no supervision or controls, and no assurances that they were not

being handed directly from a coyote at the border to a trafficker in the heartland, and left them vulnerable to exploitation and other criminal acts.

Defeating the Cartel Business Model

This administrative negligence did more than just fail these children; it financed their exploitation. The vast majority of illegal immigration at our southern border is facilitated by sophisticated, ruthless cartels that have built their business model on our own policy loopholes. Cartels knew that under the Biden Administration, trafficked children would be processed and released into the interior with virtually no oversight. "Catch and release" policies that allowed illegal immigrants to remain in our country facilitated the presence of those who trafficked these children on their arrival. By failing to enforce our laws at the border, the Federal government enabled human trafficking, not just of children but of those exploited for labor, by cartels, who profited from this trafficking and used the profits to finance their illegal activities.

Breaking this cycle requires certainty of consequences and complete border security. When we secure the border and deny illegal entry, we are not just enforcing a statute – we are bankrupting a cartel operation and protecting innocent people. When illegal entry no longer guarantees release into the interior, and when UACs are protected and monitored, the cartels lose their product, their presence in the United States, and their ability to profit from our failures.

A Year of Unprecedented Enforcement and Deterrence

Today, by prioritizing law enforcement and leveraging the authorities granted to us by Congress, the United States has the most secure border in our Nation's history. We have realigned resources, applied consequences for those who break our laws, and empowered our workforce to do their jobs. Although we have experienced tremendous success ensuring unprecedented border security, every day is a new battle to prevent cartels and other criminals from operating within our country and threatening their victims and the American people. We must stay vigilant and continue to pursue effective policy and practice daily so that our success is sustained.

National security cannot exist without effective border security. Over the past year, our enforcement efforts have been nothing short of historic across all our operational environments. As I alluded to earlier, we have achieved the lowest annual encounters in CBP's history. Total U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions along the Southwest Border during the last calendar year were approximately 90,000 — a figure lower than the monthly average during the Biden Administration.¹ Daily encounters declined by 95 percent, averaging approximately 250 per day, compared to more than 5,000 per day previously. We have also seen historically low numbers of gotaways — illegal aliens who evade apprehension by CBP.

¹ The average number of monthly apprehensions during the Biden administration was 155,485, <https://www.cbp.gov/about/history/cbps-historic-first-year-under-current-administration>

This progress is the direct result of the Administration's comprehensive enforcement approach. We ended the practice of "catch-and-release," prioritized detention and removal authorities, and sent a clear message that illegal entry into the United States will not be accommodated or rewarded. Instead, consequences will be delivered consistent with law. For nine consecutive months, U.S. Border Patrol has not released any alien who entered without authorization into the United States, a powerful reflection of restored control of our border.

Policy changes and decreased encounters have allowed us to act more strategically and execute data-driven targeted operations. This has led to increased enforcement actions. For example, since January 20, 2025, CBP seized nearly 620,000 pounds of illicit drugs nationwide, an 8 percent increase over the prior year. This included nearly 11,000 pounds of fentanyl, 185,000 pounds of methamphetamine, and significant quantities of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana.²

CBP is also a foundational partner in the President's Homeland Security Task Force (HSTF). Co-led by the FBI and ICE/HSI, these task forces now operate across all 50 states to dismantle transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and foreign gangs. CBP's unique border intelligence and interdiction capabilities are force multipliers for the HSTF, ensuring that the border is no longer a gap for TCOs to exploit, but rather the starting point to dismantle their operations entirely.

Frontline Investments in Infrastructure, Technology, and our Workforce

None of these accomplishments would be possible without the historic investments in border security made by this Administration. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, a \$65 billion border security bill, represents the largest investment in border security in a generation, providing for modern infrastructure, advanced technology, and increased law enforcement personnel.

CBP is actively executing Smart Wall construction consistent with U.S. Border Patrol requirements from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of America in support of the President's Executive Orders and CBP's statutory mission to secure the border. CBP has already placed \$12 billion in Smart Wall funding on contract, with all remaining barrier contracts scheduled for award by June 30, 2026. We anticipate completing 250 miles of new barriers by September 30, 2026. Furthermore, in January 2026, we began installing waterborne barriers in the Rio Grande, denying smugglers a key avenue for trafficking people and narcotics, enhancing natural and land-based barriers, and providing a safer operating environment for our agents.

The success of CBP's mission fundamentally relies on the expertise and dedication of our workforce. CBP is prioritizing recruiting, hiring, retention, and training to rebuild our workforce after years of attrition. Over the past year, we saw historic levels of recruitment and retention,

² <https://www.cbp.gov/about/history/cbps-historic-first-year-under-current-administration>, January 20, 2025 – January 20, 2026.

with monthly averages showing an 84 percent increase in new U.S. Border Patrol hires compared to the previous year. The Act not only supports our hiring goals by funding 5,000 more CBP officers, 3,000 Border Patrol agents, and 200 Air and Marine agents, but also provides funding for recruitment and retention, ensuring that we attract, hire, and keep the best law enforcement professionals in America.

In addition to personnel, CBP continues to invest in technology that enhances CBP's operational capabilities to detect and intercept individuals illegally crossing the border, dangerous goods and materials concealed in cargo and vehicles, and illegal activity in the air and maritime domains. With One Big Beautiful Bill funding, we are investing in non-intrusive inspection, biometrics, border surveillance equipment, aircraft, and communications systems. These investments rapidly modernize our border security posture and ensure that we remain ahead of current and emerging threats.

Supporting the Larger Federal Enforcement Mission

With record-low encounters, CBP can enhance our support of nationwide targeted operations and immigration enforcement priorities. CBP's critical support of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement interior enforcement operations enables the removal of dangerous criminals, gang members, and aliens who remain in the country illegally. CBP personnel are deployed to support targeted operations in more than 20 cities, resulting in thousands of arrests. I must note that CBP officers and agents are increasingly encountering situations in which agitators interfere with lawful enforcement actions, including attempts to obstruct arrests or intimidate law enforcement personnel. These situations are unprecedented in scale and intensity. The current operational environment puts our officers, agents, and even their families, at tremendous personal risk of violence.

Let me be clear. No law enforcement officer should be placed in a position where executing a lawful warrant or simply performing his or her lawful law enforcement duties becomes a flashpoint for confrontation with third parties. CBP officers and agents are trained to de-escalate, act professionally, and to use force only when necessary. Training cannot fully mitigate all risks created when law enforcement is undermined or publicly challenged in real time.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to emphasize that the accomplishments of the past year are not just numbers on paper. They represent lives saved, communities strengthened, and a renewed sense of safety and security for the American people. Under the unwavering leadership of President Trump and Secretary Noem, CBP delivered on its promise to secure the border, enforce the law, and protect our nation from those who would do us harm.

Our work is not complete, but we are determined to maintain and consistently increase control over our borders. We are intercepting dangerous aliens and preventing their entry. We are keeping America safe. The men and women of CBP are proud to serve, proud to protect, and proud to be part of a mission that puts the American people first.

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