

**Opening Statement**  
**Hearing before the Government Operations**  
**and Border Management Subcommittee**  
**Wednesday, June 16<sup>th</sup> at 2:30 pm**

**“Improving Security, Trade, and Travel at  
the Southwest Border.”**

- Thank you, Senator Sinema.
- We on the full committee and here on the subcommittee have been taking a look at the many issues facing our country’s Southwest border. As I’m sure we all are aware, our country continues to face a crisis of historic proportions at the Southwest border, where more than 180,000 migrants were encountered by CBP in May 2021.
- This 20-year high continues to strain our government’s resources, and it will create massive complications as our government works to re-open trade and travel along the Southern border.
- Many, if not most, of the migrants crossing our Southwest border are currently doing so between land ports of entry. Our subcommittee has previously taken a look at the role of NGOs in helping address the surge of migrants between ports of entry, and the full committee has taken a look at the surge of unaccompanied children between our ports of entry.

- The stats on migrants encountered at ports of entry along the Southwest border generally show that the number of migrants who choose to lawfully present to CBP for inspection and cross at a port are significantly down. This trend makes sense, as the ports have been closed to all unessential travel since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The data specifically show that migration at ports of entry is down by 30.81 percent from the previous fiscal year. At the same time, migration *between* the ports is up more than 291 percent from the previous fiscal year.
- While migration at our ports of entry might be slightly down, the amount of drugs seized by CBP's Office of Field Operations is at a record high.
- In May 2021, CBP officials seized 1,300 pounds of heroin and fentanyl at our ports of entry. This is a 143 percent increase from the amount of heroin and fentanyl seized in May 2020.
- In May 2021, CBP officials seized 18,819 pounds of methamphetamine, a nearly 72 percent increase from May 2020.
- These numbers are gravely concerning, especially as the DEA has noted in its 2020 National Drug Threat Assessment that "Mexican [Transnational Criminal Organizations] continue to control lucrative smuggling corridors, primarily across the Southwest

border, and maintain the greatest drug trafficking influence in the United States.”

- According to the DEA, “Cartels transport bulk quantity, polydrug loads via commercial and passenger vehicles,” and they do so by exploiting “major highway routes for transportation.” The DEA notes that the most common method of drug smuggling into the United States involves “smuggling illicit drugs through U.S. Ports of Entry in passenger vehicles with concealed compartments or commingled with legitimate goods on tractor-trailers.”
- Even with our ports closed to non-essential travel, we’re seeing huge amounts of narcotics flow through our ports of entry. As we begin re-opening to non-essential travel, we’ll begin straining the capacity of our ports and could see the narcotics flow become even worse.
- The GSA recently told Congress in a report that “Steady global and regional growth has funneled more people and goods through the Nation’s aging land port of entry infrastructure than it is able to handle. Two-thirds of our land ports of entry have not had capital improvements over the past decade.”
- We’ve been hearing a lot about disrupted supply chains, long wait times for shipped goods, and serious issues obtaining the analogs and components need for manufacturing due to COVID.

- As our nation begins re-opening, we'll continue to see this issue come to the forefront as our capacity is strained.
- Beyond the strained capacity for consumer goods and agricultural imports and exports, we'll also see CBP have to make difficult decisions about how to balance the lawful facilitation of trade and travel with the need to protect our country from illicit narcotics.
- Unless the Biden Administration gets its border policies straight, we'll also likely see CBP deal with additional migration surges that will only further strain its capacity to operate our ports of entry effectively.
- Many of our ports along the Southwest border were built before NAFTA and the USMCA, and they haven't been touched since these two agreements went into effect.
- I'm very excited today to hear from our witnesses about what we in Congress should be looking at to strengthen the security of our ports of entry and ensure that we better facilitate lawful trade and travel.
- Thank you for appearing before our committee today, I look forward to the discussion.