

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
“Unprecedented Migration at the U.S. Southern Border: What Is Required to
Improve Conditions?”

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GARY C. PETERS
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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Earlier this year, I joined Chairman Johnson and Senator Hassan on a bipartisan Congressional delegation visit to the U.S.-Mexico border. On that trip, we saw firsthand the tremendous challenges Department of Homeland Security personnel and local communities face daily at our Southern border.

Our infrastructure and personnel are overwhelmed. Resources are stretched thin and being shifted away from other priorities like the Northern border. And our capacity to address the humanitarian needs of children and families is overburdened.

Despite those difficulties, we witnessed hardworking law enforcement officers, public servants, volunteers, and civic leaders doing their very best to manage an incredibly difficult situation.

At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the reports and images that have emerged regarding substandard conditions, unacceptable treatment, and tragic deaths of children at some Customs and Border Protection facilities.

And I am alarmed at the reports we have seen regarding unprofessional and unacceptable conduct from a small number of Border Patrol agents.

The situation at our Southern Border is incredibly challenging.

It is clear that our current system is not equipped to process and care for the unprecedented number of families and children seeking asylum at our Southern border.

The images we have seen and the stories we have heard do not reflect the overall efforts of Customs and Border Protection, the hardworking men and women who secure our borders. And they certainly do not reflect the values of this great nation.

But it is clear that there are significant challenges on the ground and, to some extent, problems within the agency’s culture that must be swiftly and appropriately addressed.

In recent weeks, we have seen a decline in the number of migrants arriving along our Southern border.

The pressure appears to be decreasing, at least temporarily. This drop has helped ease overcrowding at many border facilities.

Billions of dollars in supplemental funding has enabled DHS to improve their response to these challenges. And today I hope this committee will hear specifics on how these additional taxpayer dollars are being used.

However, as members of this Committee know, much of the migration that occurs from Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries is seasonal.

This fall, we can expect to see the number of arrivals rise again.

We now have an opportunity to examine where we have failed and where we have succeeded, and put lessons into practice for the future.

We need innovative ideas to improve migrant processing, to relieve the strain on our frontline border security professionals and other agencies that have provided support services in recent months, and to keep our borders secure and our country safe.

Few issues we face are as complex as this one. But today, I hope that we can find common ground, identify bipartisan solutions, and deliver real, comprehensive result for the American people.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to your testimony.