

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
“CBP Oversight: Examining the Evolving Challenges Facing the Agency”**

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GARY C. PETERS

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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and thank you Acting Commissioner Morgan for being here with us today.

Customs and Border Protection has played a vital role on the frontlines of our nation’s efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19 and keep Americans safe.

Even in the face of a deadly virus that has infected millions around the globe and killed more than 120,000 Americans, the men and women of CBP continue to do their essential jobs and protect our national security in very difficult situations.

However, CBP’s service has not been without sacrifice. And I want to acknowledge the losses your agency has suffered during this pandemic.

The lives of officers is a terrible price to pay, and I think I speak for all members of this committee when I express my grief and condolences to their families and to everyone at CBP.

In order to prevent more tragedy at the agency, we must ensure that frontline agents and Customs and Border Protection Officers have access to the personal protective equipment necessary to defend against COVID-19. We count on these officers to keep us safe. But they cannot do so effectively if they themselves are left unprotected.

Even in normal times, the agency plays an important role in border states like my home state of Michigan. And, as we are all aware, these are far from normal times.

In the face of the Coronavirus, CBP has been tasked with limiting unnecessary travel between Canada and the United States, while continuing to support trade and essential services, including the vital medical professionals who cross the border to support Detroit’s efforts to combat COVID-19.

As the nation looks to reopen, cross-border communities in states like Michigan will rely on clear and well-communicated information about plans for loosening restrictions at the border. We must avoid confusion and uncertainties that occurred as these restrictions were announced and implemented.

As we continue reopening, more trade and travelers will be returning to our nation’s ports of entry, especially at airports and land crossings. We must be diligent in applying the lessons learned over the past few months to ensure that CBP is ready to safely meet changing circumstances.

And as we continue to move forward, we must strive to both implement strong safety and security measures and uphold our nation's long-held values for the families and children who continue to seek asylum at our Southern Border.

CBP's priorities are often difficult to balance but the agency cannot simply abandon one part of their mission because things get tough. Congress and the Administration must work together to support effective trade, travel, migration, and security operations, especially in the midst of a pandemic.

Thank you for taking the time to be here with us today. I look forward to your testimony and hearing what we can do to assist you in facing those challenges head on.