

**U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee**  
**“Authorities and Resources Needed to Protect and Secure the United States”**

**May 15, 2018**

**Ranking Member Claire McCaskill**

**Opening Statement**

Thank you, Secretary Nielsen, for appearing before us to discuss resources needed to protect and secure the United States. I want to thank you and the men and women of DHS for your service to our nation. I appreciate you appearing before us and being willing to talk about DHS’s budget, authorities and policies—some of which are a matter of some controversy.

As we discuss FY 2019 budget priorities and resources for the Department, I think it is important to point out that one of the key functions of this committee is to provide oversight. We ask questions that are not easy; questions that may be uncomfortable, but that can ultimately lead to a safer United States for all Americans. In conducting oversight, my colleagues and I will continue to demand honest and professional answers from you and the components of your department. I have said it before, and I will say it again, I have never found any government agency that worked better with less oversight. I will continue to ask hard questions, and I hope that you will live up to your duty to answer them.

Today, I want to talk about a threat that continues to affect Americans across our country, and especially my home state of Missouri: the opioid epidemic.

While the opioid epidemic is certainly a public health crisis, it is also a border security crisis. The border may seem far from many of the communities impacted by this epidemic, but lapses in the security of those borders have compromised our efforts to stop it from spreading.

As you know, DHS, and in particular its component Customs and Border Protection (or CBP), play a critical role in stemming the opioid epidemic by stopping illicit opioids, like fentanyl, before they can enter the United States. Understanding CBP's efforts to intercept opioids is critical to understanding how we can work to prevent more opioids from getting past their detection efforts.

Last week I released a report from the minority staff of this committee analyzing efforts taken by DHS to stem the opioid crisis. Mr. Chairman, I would ask that this report, "Combating the Opioid Epidemic: Intercepting Illicit Opioids at Ports of Entry," be entered into the record.

This report's findings paint a grim picture. It shows that the amount of the illicit opioid fentanyl seized by CBP is increasing dramatically, and that despite this, DHS has failed to adequately resource the areas where it is most commonly seized.

The report found that 88% of all opioids seized over the past five years were seized at ports of entry as opposed to other locations along the border. In just five years, Port Officers alone seized over 25,000 pounds of heroin, morphine, prescription opiates, and fentanyl. It also found that across CBP, the amount of fentanyl being seized is increasing rapidly. At ports of entry, which seize 85% of all the fentanyl seized by CBP, the amount of fentanyl seized has doubled in just one year.

According to our investigation, CBP is facing fentanyl seizure increases on two major fronts, at land ports of entry on the southern border, and in mail facilities. Land ports of entry on the southern border simply do not have enough officers to address this. The two field offices that seized more than half of all of CBP's opioid seizures having staffing shortages so pronounced that CBP addressed it with its own mission name: QUOTE "Operation Overflow." For the last two years, this operation has diverted between 80 and 100 officers to temporarily make up staffing shortages at these critical border crossings. Mail facilities are similarly feeling staffing strains. Right now, although mail facilities have the largest number of individual CBP seizures of opioids, less than 400 Port Officers are there to inspect packages. The U.S. Postal Service alone sees more than 1.3 million packages every day; that is not to mention all of the packages coming in via fed ex

and UPS. We are facing an epidemic that is increasingly coming in through the mail, and we have only 400 overworked Port Officers to stop it.

What is not commonly known is that DHS differentiates between officers at ports of entry and officers in areas along the border. While DHS's budget prioritizes funding to support personnel along the border and in the interior of the United States, ports of entry have been completely left out. In its FY 2019 budget, DHS is requesting NO additional officers that will go to ports of entry.

Across the United States, ports of entry are understaffed by over 4,000 positions. That is several thousand officers that could be preventing opioids from entering the United States. Even if CBP hires all of the authorized positions they are allotted, they would be 2,700 positions short of THEIR OWN ANALYSIS of what they need.

Right now Americans across the United States are being impacted by an epidemic that is growing in part because of our failure stop the threat before it crosses our border. Border security means security across the whole border and leaving ports of entry out creates gaps in our security. As I have said, there is no silver bullet to solving this epidemic. But we know where the vast majority of opioids are entering the United States. The very least we can do is provide our ports with the resources and staffing they need.

Secretary Nielsen, I thank you for appearing before us, and I look forward to your answers.