

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Unprecedented Migration at the U.S. Southern Border: By the Numbers”
April 4, 2019**

**Senator Gary C. Peters, Ranking Member
*Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery***

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today. I appreciate your focus on obtaining accurate, timely data on migration and border security. Few issues we face are as complex as this one, or as controversial. Far too often, harmful rhetoric drowns out reasonable dialogue. I hope that this hearing can cut through the rhetoric and focus on the facts.

The situation on our southern border, in Mexico, and throughout the Northern Triangle is dynamic. Our immigration system and infrastructure should reflect that.

The reality is that much of our current infrastructure was built to address the challenges of the 1990's and early last decade, when the majority of unauthorized border crossings were single men seeking economic opportunity.

That is not what statistics show us today, and it is not what our staff saw during a bipartisan delegation to the southern border last month.

Overwhelmingly, they saw families from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

They saw parents with children. They saw children who had made the journey to our border without their parents. And they saw our hardworking law enforcement officers, public servants, volunteers, and civic leaders doing their best to manage a very difficult situation.

Many of these families are fleeing violence and extortion. Homicide rates in the Northern Triangle are some of the highest in the world. Corruption and impunity prevail. Only three out of every **one hundred** homicides lead to a trial and conviction. This breakdown of the rule of law is a clear “push factor” that drives migrants to flee these countries.

Unfortunately, our system has not been able to keep pace with the increase in asylum claims.

Screening interviews are being delayed. The average wait to appear before an immigration court is now over **two years** and the backlog is quickly approaching one million cases. This is unacceptable.

We need to do more to decrease processing times while increasing border security. We absolutely need secure borders, but it will take cooperation and credibility, not chaos and confusion.

This administration will need to cooperate with Mexico – Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and international organizations to take on cartels and corruption. They will also need to cooperate with Congress and build credibility.

Unfortunately, this administration has provided too much chaos and confusion, and too little credibility. It has been one step forward and two steps back.

DOJ approved a plan to reduce immigration court backlogs only to see backlogs grow as a result of an unnecessary government shutdown.

We passed a bipartisan deal to make meaningful investments in security for both our northern and southern border, only to see the President unilaterally declare a national emergency to circumvent Congress and potentially pull away funds from important military construction projects.

In February, the Department of Homeland Security announced a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Northern Triangle nations to combat human trafficking and organized crime, only to see the President cut off existing funding to these countries just five weeks later.

Chaos is not a strategy. We need bipartisan cooperation at home and effective American leadership projected abroad.

This is still possible. Just yesterday, I introduced bipartisan legislation with Senator Cornyn from Texas to address staffing shortages at our ports of entry across our nation, northern and southern border alike.

This is especially important now as DHS is potentially moving upwards of 2,000 Customs and Border Protection officers to the southern border.

I believe this legislation is an important first step we can take to reduce the strain on our southern border and improve the facilitation of trade, travel, and commerce across the United States, but there is clearly much more to do.

Thank you, and I look forward to today's discussion.