

**OVERSIGHT OF THE ATF NATIONAL CANINE
DIVISION**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION

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OVERSIGHT OF THE ATF NATIONAL CANINE DIVISION

MONDAY, JULY 16, 2018

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 9:37 p.m., at the Warren County Government Center, 220 N. Commerce Avenue, Front Royal, Virginia, Hon. Bob Goodlatte [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representative Goodlatte.

Also Present: Representative Comstock.

Staff Present: Jason Cervenak, Senior Counsel; Scott Johnson, Professional Staff Member; and Joe Graupensperger, Minority Counsel.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Well, thank you, Tony. I know how important this facility is to Warren County, both from an economic development standpoint and for the great people who work there.

So, with that, the Judiciary Committee will come to order. And we welcome everyone this morning to the committee's oversight of the ATF National Training Division. And I will begin by giving an opening statement.

I want to welcome everyone to today's field hearing in Front Royal, Virginia, located in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley. I want to thank Congresswoman Comstock for joining me. And I want to thank the Warren County Government Center for hosting this very important hearing on oversight of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives' Canine Training Center, an integral part of the National Canine Division.

The ATF National Canine Division trains explosives- and accelerant-detection canines for Federal, State, and local and international law enforcement and fire investigation agencies. Since 1990, the ATF has trained over 900 explosives-detection canines, more than 200 accelerant-detection canines, and has trained canine teams for 22 international countries. In addition, the training center has imprinted approximately 3,800 Department of Defense military working dogs from March 2009 through December 2017.

Since 2012, the ATF canine center has been located in the Sixth District of Virginia, which I have been proud to represent for the past 26 years, although not all those 26 years here in Warren County in Front Royal. I have had the opportunity to visit the training center and see firsthand the amazing capabilities of our

four-legged friends. I even hosted the dogs at an event in the Rayburn House Office Building at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., to showcase their talents. I have been proud to represent this world-class training facility during my tenure as chairman of the Judiciary Committee.

These canines are not just serving the ATF. Many of these dogs trained by the ATF end up serving with our State and local law enforcement partners, and, of course, they serve all of us as citizens. They train alongside their handlers at a facility a few miles down the road from here that we will have the opportunity to visit immediately after this hearing.

It is not only our State and local partners that benefit from the center but our international partners as well. It truly is a world-renowned program, a program that has been very productive and successful throughout the years. In fact, in recent months, ATF-trained canine teams aided in a number of high-profile investigations, including the Austin bombings and in the aftermath of the Sante Fe, Texas, school shootings.

It is because of the success of this center that I am troubled about the desire of some of my colleagues to transfer the training facility from its home in Front Royal to Huntsville, Alabama. I realize the cynics may claim that I am being territorial, but I firmly believe that moving this center would not only be a colossal waste of taxpayer money but also put public safety at significant risk.

In 2016, the Senate Appropriations Committee directed ATF to examine the feasibility of moving the canine training and kennel facilities from Front Royal to Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. ATF completed a preliminary feasibility study in 2016. The study found that building a comparable canine training and kennel facility at Redstone would cost millions of taxpayer dollars, require intensive talent recruitment for the new facility, and result in the loss of key National Canine Division personnel due to the move. Altogether, the study concluded that the move would substantially disrupt continuity of operations and mission readiness.

Thereafter, ATF commissioned an independent environmental evaluation of the proposed Huntsville site by AECOM Technical Services, Incorporated. In November 2017, AECOM provided ATF with an environmental evaluation of the proposed Huntsville kennel site. The study focused on three categories: surface soil assessments, noise evaluation, and air dispersion modeling. After reviewing the findings of the study, the ATF concluded that, quote, "our experts strongly recommend that the facility remain in its current location."

ATF concluded that the levels of trace explosive contaminants in the soil posed a significant problem for canine performance and reliability. Specifically, the ATF stated that the levels of explosive contaminants in the soil, quote, "present obstacles that are likely insurmountable to the initial imprinting of the canines to detect explosives and accelerants," end quote.

ATF elaborated that, quote, "initial imprinting is absolutely essential to ATF's well-established and internationally recognized training regimes." And the contaminants at Redstone Arsenal raise concern that the canine may begin to associate the environmental explosive contaminants with the target odor. Put simply, you can't

train a bomb-sniffing dog at a place where everything smells like a bomb.

The study also contained a noise evaluation which focused on the effect of the nearby active explosive range, finding that blasting activities at Corkern Range have a clear potential to affect dogs at the proposed kennel site, especially if the dogs are outdoors at the time of the blasting activity. Pointing out that ATF canines are outdoors for approximately 6 hours of their 8-hour shift, ATF concluded that keeping the canines indoors during blasting is impractical and, therefore, the blasting activities could further affect canine training.

Altogether, after reviewing the study, cost, and other considerations, the ATF concluded moving the NCD from Front Royal, Virginia, to Huntsville, Alabama, would significantly diminish and perhaps irreparably damage the canine program and its mission to protect the public and fight violent crime.

At this time, I would like to ask unanimous consent to place the report by the ATF on the proposed move into the record. And, without objection, it will be made a part of the record.

Irreparable damage is a cost too high to pay when it comes to the vital public safety duties these canines perform. This facility must remain right here in Front Royal. The proposed move could completely wreck ATF's ability to produce reliable explosive-detecting dogs.

Thank you, Deputy Director Brandon, for joining us today to discuss this vital issue, and I look forward to your testimony.

Next, as is the custom of this committee, we will swear in the witness. So if you would please raise your right hand.

Do you swear that the testimony that you are about to give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Let the record note that the witness answered in the affirmative.

Deputy Director Brandon has served as Deputy Director since April 1, 2015. In this capacity, he oversees the Bureau and its important jurisdiction enforcing firearms and explosive laws and regulations that protect communities from violent criminals and criminal organizations.

Director Brandon began his ATF career in 1989 as a special agent in Detroit. Since then, he has served in numerous leadership positions across the United States and abroad. His distinguished career in public service not only includes his tenure with the ATF but also with the United States Marine Corps.

Thank you for your service.

Your written statement will be entered into the record in its entirety, and we ask that you summarize your testimony in 5 minutes.

Welcome, Director.

TESTIMONY OF THOMAS BRANDON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CANINE DIVISION, BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, FIREARMS, AND EXPLOSIVES

Mr. BRANDON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Chairman Goodlatte and Congresswoman Comstock, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you regarding ATF's National Canine Division here in Front Royal, Virginia.

As mentioned, ATF has been training dogs here for Federal, State, local, and international law enforcement and fire investigation agencies since 1995. The center is located on 250 acres of pristine land on the edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains near Front Royal in the northern Shenandoah Valley. We share the Front Royal campus with our partners from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which has allowed us to realize efficiencies by combining our resources and expertise.

We frequently make reference to the environment here as pristine, and, undoubtedly, it is a beautiful location. But it is also no coincidence that our facility is located in such a clean place. This is because, in order to imprint our dogs to detect minute amounts of ignitable liquids and explosives materials, it is necessary to train dogs in an environment that is entirely free of accelerant and explosive residue.

From start to finish, the trainers, handlers, and staff are meticulous in their handling of these materials in order to maintain full control of the imprinting process. ATF forensic chemists and canine experts employ a strict regimen to ensure canines are trained to detect target odor only and not secondary scents in the soil or otherwise.

Contamination of any type has a significant impact on the training, confidence, and reliability of the canine. Trace contaminants found in the soil become problematic during training when canines begin to associate the environmental explosives constituents with the target odor. If the environmental odor and target odor become one, the canine will no longer detect the target odor when transferred to another environment, and the canine becomes unreliable.

I cannot overemphasize how important it is to prevent cross-contamination when imprinting and training our canines.

ATF has trained approximately 1,200 canines for 102 U.S. law enforcement agencies and 22 international partners at the Front Royal campus. In 2017 alone, the National Canine Division in Front Royal trained, recertified, and/or tested approximately 751 explosive and accelerant actively deployed detection canines.

In addition, ATF's Front Royal campus is one of the few facilities with the capacity and expertise to train U.S. military working dogs to combat the escalating threat of homemade explosives and improvised explosive devices. Since 2009, we have trained approximately 3,840 military working dogs for the U.S. military and NATO.

Bombing incidents, such as the tragic events in Austin, are an excellent example of why the trace odor detection capabilities of the canines are critical to law enforcement operations. By their nature, bombing scenes are covered with debris. Some of the debris is critical evidence, and some is just the result of the blast. To a human eye, it all appears all the same, but not to an ATF canine.

The ATF canines deployed in Austin were able to rapidly differentiate between the two, ensuring the collection of only those items of evidentiary value and allowing forensic lab examiners to focus on critical evidence examination and not waste valuable investigative time on extraneous debris.

Mr. Chairman and Congresswoman Comstock, we are very proud of our facility here in Front Royal, and it is without exaggeration that I can say it is one of the best canine facilities in the world. ATF canine teams provide a critical resource both in preventing and countering explosives and arson incidents and investigating such incidents when they occur. Their capabilities are unmatched.

And I welcome your questions about our canine program on the Front Royal campus. Thank you.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Thank you very much, Director Brandon.

I note that you have a couple of your employees here who I got introduced to before we came in. I wonder if you might let their handlers introduce them and tell everyone here a little bit about them.

Mr. DAWKINS. I'm Special Agent Randall Dawkins out of the Dallas Field Division. This is ATF canine Abel. He just turned 6 in June. And his last big deployment was the Austin bombing, which the Director just referenced.

Chairman GOODLATTE. So he's a hero of the Austin bombings—

Mr. DAWKINS. Yes.

Chairman GOODLATTE [continuing]. Solving that and catching that perpetrator.

Mr. DAWKINS. He played a critical role, and we're glad to be able to do so.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Thank you.

Mr. HODNETT. Good morning. My name is Mike Hodnett. I am the canine handler in Baltimore. This is my partner, Tara. She's my second dog. She just graduated school about 2½ weeks ago, so she's fairly new out in the field. She's about 2 years old.

Chairman GOODLATTE. She's brand-new, and she was trained here in Front Royal?

Mr. HODNETT. Absolutely, sir. Yes.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Very good. Very good.

Director Brandon, how long did it take to get the ATF canine center here in Front Royal to the point where you are right now?

Mr. BRANDON. Mr. Chairman, Congressman Wolf, at the time, gave ATF the funds to build about a 21,000-square-foot facility to where we would do the training and house our personnel. And then, around 2000, 2001, Congressman Wolf ensured we had the money to build a state-of-the-art kennel that can house 100 canines.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Excellent.

And what are the benefits of having the ATF facility here in Front Royal?

Mr. BRANDON. Well, it's in the national capital region, Mr. Chairman. There's a lot of synergy that goes on with working with other agencies. I mean, we have our other Federal partners that rely on us—the Capitol Police, the Pentagon Police, the Park Police, intelligence agencies, DOD, the military and their civilian agencies. And so you're able to collaborate and be in close proximity.

And the other thing, an international airport, Dulles, between D.C. and being here, is an excellent resource to be able to fly in and out, both domestic and international flights.

And I would be remiss if—all the goodwill that the people of Front Royal, Warren County, about 120 businesses that have taken

years. They welcome our staff and our trainers to come to their businesses, parks, facilities. And that enables us to have such great dogs, when they're out in the field doing the real work, that I would say the people here of Front Royal and Warren County, they equally should feel proud. And we're proud of them, because when they see these dogs deployed, and our dogs have come to their businesses, and they allowed them in so graciously, it wouldn't happen if they weren't such loyal Americans.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Well, thank you. I think they are very proud of this facility. And many of them know a good bit about it, but probably very few of them know the extent of this facility's reputation, not just in the United States but around the world.

You mentioned the Dulles International Airport. That's important because law enforcement organizations around the world send people here to Front Royal to learn how to handle a dog that they are getting this facility to train and to take and help prevent terrorist attacks, fight crime in places across the globe.

Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Mr. BRANDON. Yes, Mr. Chairman. And, to your point, yes, whether countries in the Middle East that we have trained or Southeast Asia, around the globe, this canine facility here in Front Royal, ATF's National Canine Division, is world-renowned.

And it is because of the mission of—our dogs are trained to detect minute amounts of explosives material, and here in the United States for accelerant-detection canines, for arson scenes as well. But for internationally it is the explosive-detection canines. You just don't find that anywhere else. So they wouldn't waste their time coming—and I know the State Department sees the results. They hear about it. And, of course, it creates even more demand for the excellent program we have here. And Dulles Airport is critical for that.

Chairman GOODLATTE. And you mentioned the great partnerships that you have with the local businesses that help support this facility and its employees. It takes a while to establish those kinds of relationships, to find the right people to provide the right services and products that you need to make this facility run properly, does it not?

Mr. BRANDON. Yes, sir. It's taken decades. And it's the old trust, you know, that they trust us and we trust them. And there's, I would say, I guess, just the joint appreciation, that it's a win-win.

Chairman GOODLATTE. And if this facility were moved somewhere else, it would have to start all over again in terms of that kind of relationship with important local vendors.

Mr. BRANDON. That is true, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman GOODLATTE. All right.

You also mentioned the co-location with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which allows you to share resources and achieve savings. Can you say a word about that?

Mr. BRANDON. Yes, sir.

Like I said, it's 250 acres of pristine, gorgeous property. And it's gorgeous out here. But we are able to share cost. We have a contract that we reimburse them for a part of the security and the maintenance of the roads, but that we own those two buildings that I said Congressman Wolf got us the money for. But we're able to

be on that land which we don't own, and CBP maintains and prorates the cost for our use of it.

Chairman GOODLATTE. So we didn't invite Customs and Border Patrol to come today, but they have another facility here as well. I haven't been in it, but it's just down the road. And they also train canines there, and they train them for the purpose of customs enforcement so that, when goods and sometimes individuals come into the country off of international flights or at ports, those canines have a role to fulfill there, too, as well.

Do you know a little bit about that?

Mr. BRANDON. Sir, you summarized basically what I know, but that they have a vibrant program, and they have—and it's my understanding their facility suits them perfectly.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Well, I have some more questions, but I know Congresswoman Comstock does as well.

So let me just first say that I really appreciate Congresswoman Comstock, who represents the adjoining area in the 10th Congressional District, which includes Frederick County and Winchester just to the north and Clarke County and then on east in towards Fairfax County. And I know that some of the people who work at this facility and probably some of the businesses who support the facility are in her congressional district.

So I'm very grateful that she came today. She's not a member of the Judiciary Committee, but she is a very valued Member of Congress. And I appreciate her being here today to show her concern about this issue as well.

So I recognize her at this time.

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And great to be with you today.

Since I had worked with Congressman Wolf as a staffer back in the '90s—I worked with him from '90 to '95, so I was able to serve this area when he represented this area, and I know about, you know, his interest and smart things that he did for this area but also in the national interest.

And, you know, as we looked at this, and you're saying you have interests who want to move it away, it reminded me of when I worked for the Congressman at that time. And, actually, we were in the minority at that time, as Republicans. But a very powerful Senator, Senator Byrd in West Virginia, wanted to move the CIA to West Virginia. And that was a project that I worked on with Congressman Wolf, to keep the CIA in Virginia. It's actually in my home precinct where I live now. I live right by the CIA.

So a lot of similarities here, where there have been a lot of investments made here and very important relationships and expertise that you have here and, you know, support in the community. And it really is, sort of, if it ain't broke, why we would be trying to fix it. You know, this has really been working well. You have the expertise and the leadership here. You have the support, as was mentioned, just all of the adjoining assets that you have, from Dulles Airport—which I'm certainly very interested in maintaining that and continuing to be able to support the many needs that we have there. So I really do appreciate all that you've put together here.

So I did want to ask about, you know, sort of, the relationships also with the surrounding counties and some of that, just in terms of how those have built up also.

Mr. BRANDON. Yes, ma'am. Thank you for the question.

You know, our relationships for the accelerant-detection canines and the fire marshals in the surrounding area, in the capital region, Maryland and West Virginia and Virginia, really enables our staff to train the canines. Because of the great relationships, there are numerous scenes that reduce cost because you're not having to travel all around the country.

And when the dogs are going through training, it's through those relationships that we've built with surrounding counties and the surrounding—or the capital region that enables us to deliver well-trained explosive-detection canines and accelerant-detection canines.

Mrs. COMSTOCK. And can you speak a little bit about why this canine program is in such high demand and why we wouldn't want to have disruption for this and build up, you know, and having to rework all of this and interrupting this at all.

Mr. BRANDON. Thank you, ma'am, for that question.

It is the uniqueness of ATF explosive-detection canines, and I keep reiterating the minute level of explosives that they can be found. So they're used for security sweeps, but they're used—like, in the Austin bombing, when they had the FedEx facility, which all of a sudden you have all these—one device that detonated, another one that was not detected yet. Our dogs—and I'm proud to say, you know, our handler and the dogs here were able to clear a scene and restore public confidence, in working with our law enforcement partners from the Austin P.D. and the FBI and the Texas Rangers, is they realized the expertise of these dogs. Some dogs are trained to detect gross explosive weight, you know, and here they're able to go even smaller. And that's what's unique about our program.

And I guess another story would be, November of 2017, in New Jersey, there was a car stop. And it was a request, I believe, of the State police. And our dog hit on the trunk of a car. And within that trunk were two firearms that would've never been detected because of such a low level. And you're talking about a firearm that was just discharged. Those guns turned out to be murder weapons.

And another incident I can tell you, in 2010, I was on scene in Detroit. Officer Huff, God rest his soul, was shot and killed. Three other officers were hit. And I remember calling our explosive-detection canine to the scene at the request of then the deputy chief of Detroit that was on scene with me. And rounds weren't found in the high grass around the area, and our dog within 2 minutes detected those casings.

And I'm proud to say that we were a participant with Detroit P.D., and that perpetrator is doing three life sentences. And we were proud to say that we used our explosive-detection canine to discover those casings that were used in the shooting, and also our laboratory in Ammdendale, Maryland, that provided those resources to the P.D.

Mrs. COMSTOCK. And maybe since I am—I haven't been, you know, on the committee, so I'm a little—well, I guess we know why they want to move it. But, you know, as we looked at the CIA and

that move, you know, we realized all the disruption it would have. So could you maybe speak to the kind of disruption that would happen if it were moved to the entire program as well as to the expertise that has been really stood up here in this area and trying to replicate that?

Mr. BRANDON. Thank you, ma'am, for the question.

Like the chairman said, I know that we would lose our people. We have trainers that have decades of experience here. Again, what we've established over two decades with the community, you know, and the trust, it's working well. And then, you know, the subject-matter experts that wrote the executive summary for me and that's been shared feel that it would take our program significantly back.

And that's why I gave you stories of real-life examples of—this isn't a game. This is real life-and-death situations and catching killers, from the bomber in Austin to the case I just mentioned in Detroit. And I couldn't sit here in front of you and lie to you and say, yeah, that there won't be a disruption.

Things are going well here. I'm very proud of our National Canine Division and the employees. And I'm also very proud to read how the community engages us—because that's what I was told, but it was nice to read in the papers.

So it would set us back, based on what I've been told by my subject-matter experts.

Mrs. COMSTOCK. No, I think it's pretty clear. And I think the record does reflect that this would also be a cost to the taxpayer. So we have something that is working well, and we don't need to be changing this when we've developed this expertise.

And having been privileged to work at the Justice Department, also, after working for Congressman Wolf, I know you appreciate how, when you build up this expertise and that kind of trust, that is not something that's easily replicated. And, you know, so I certainly want to work with the chairman on making sure that we keep this here.

So I appreciate all you're doing to let the community know about the importance of this. And I think the fact that everyone's here today reflects their understanding of the importance of this, too, to the region.

And I just thank you for all the good work that I know that you have been doing here for years.

Mr. BRANDON. Thank you, ma'am.

Mrs. COMSTOCK. And I yield back.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Thank you.

We'll do a second of round. I have a number of additional questions I want to make sure we get on the record.

You mentioned the Customs and Border Patrol. How does the center's current location benefit other Federal agencies in the region?

Mr. BRANDON. Well, sir, like I mentioned, we provide services to the Marshals Service, to the Capitol Police, the Pentagon Police, military intelligence agencies. So being here allows for collaborative efforts on any—even research. And so location matters when you're trying to get various agencies together to address any public safety concerns.

Chairman GOODLATTE. And the ATF recently conducted an environmental study. Can you briefly share the outcome of that study?

Mr. BRANDON. Yes, sir. The environmental study came out of the feasibility study where our subject-matter experts recommended the environmental study. And AECOM did it, so it's independent of ATF. We didn't want to have any bias in putting our thumb on the scale.

And so, as you mentioned, the soil analysis. They took eight samples, and all of them, every one of them, had contaminants.

Chairman GOODLATTE. And this is in Alabama.

Mr. BRANDON. Correct, sir.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Redstone in Huntsville.

Mr. BRANDON. Yes, sir. And we were complying with what we were ordered, you know, in 2016 to do.

The environmental study was done in September of 2017, and we got the report November of 2017. And then our subject-matter experts looked at that, and what the—AECOM, they deferred to ATF subject-matter experts when it came to soil contaminants. They said that it wasn't a risk to the health and safety of our employees or the canines. However, our forensic chemists, who helped establish this fabulous canine program from such minute levels, that's where you say you have a target odor and an environmental odor, and that they said it would be not a good location, based on the results of an independent environmental study, for training our dogs.

Chairman GOODLATTE. And what is the role of these dogs after some of the tragic mass shootings that we've had around the Nation?

Mr. BRANDON. Well, like, Mr. Chairman, in the Parkland shooting, I'm recalling that our dogs were used to help sweep the school, you know, and detect any IEDs and so forth.

So they're a readily welcomed asset to our State and local partners because of the unique capability of trace amount of explosives, minute amount of explosives material. And if you're smelling a—if the dog is smelling a locker—I will give you a recent example. I was told one of our dogs, even—there was a dead body, not in the shooting incident. But what the dog alerted to, because of its excellent training here in Front Royal in a pristine environment without contaminants, the casing was under the dead body, and the dog's training allowed it to bypass the odor of a decayed body. And when the body was removed, the casing was under the body.

So I just use that as another story to just sell—or state why a pristine environment matters. It produces results. And the environmental study on the soil analysis, their data defaulted to us to make a determination, us being my subject-matter experts, a forensic chemist and our long-term canine trainers, and they said that would have a detrimental effect on training. It would make the dogs incapable of performing.

Chairman GOODLATTE. So a major part of their function is to be able to distinguish various odors related to gun powder and explosives from everything else around them. And if you're at a facility that specializes in blowing things up and testing explosives and so on, that's going to be everywhere. And if you're trying to train the dog to look for one shell casing or one IED or whatever the case

may be, that's going to cause major confusion in the training process before you ever get to a point where the dog is reliable, like our dog here was down in Austin, Texas.

Mr. BRANDON. Yes, sir. The dogs are trained to recognize six families of explosives. And, as I mentioned, the environmental study took eight samples, and in those samples were two of those six families. And to the point of it would be an environmental odor versus a target odor, and the dogs wouldn't be able to differentiate between the two, and it would make them ineffective.

Chairman GOODLATTE. We use the word "imprinted" when we're referring to these dogs. How are ATF dogs imprinted?

Mr. BRANDON. Mr. Chairman, before the dogs are even introduced to their handler, our canine specialists spend 6 weeks imprinting them. And our forensic chemists work that there is pristine examples of the explosives material to imprint them. So that is a critical time of processing.

And, again, it's in the report, but the word "pristine" is appropriate. In order to properly imprint the dog, you need a pristine environment. And we have been doing that here for decades in Front Royal.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Are there any savings to the taxpayer if the ATF canine center is moved to Huntsville?

Mr. BRANDON. Sir, the estimated cost for moving would be \$40 million. The estimated cost for staying would be we wouldn't spend \$40 million for moving.

Chairman GOODLATTE. That's a—that's a lot of money, even for the Federal Government.

Mr. BRANDON. Yes, sir.

Chairman GOODLATTE. If forced to move to Huntsville, can you guarantee that the canines would have the same reliability?

Mr. BRANDON. No, sir.

Chairman GOODLATTE. And, in your mind, can you think of any good reason to move the canine center to Huntsville?

Mr. BRANDON. You know, Mr. Chairman, when I came in in 2011, former U.S. attorney and Acting Director, Mike Sullivan, a Republican, called me to say congratulations, and I asked him, you know, "Do you have any advice?" and he said, "Listen well and ask good questions."

So, when this originally came as a proposed moved, I kept an open mind and, I think, asked good questions. I wasn't prejudged to say no. But based on the information that has been presented to me by subject-matter experts at ATF that have been doing this with a passion for decades and an independent environmental study, I cannot see a reason.

Chairman GOODLATTE. We'll have the opportunity later to ask them personally, but what do you think your employees would say when asked if they like being here in Front Royal, Virginia?

Mr. BRANDON. Oh, hey, Mr. Chairman, they love being out here. I would love being out here, you know? I mean, so—I've never heard a complaint when saying, "You're going to Front Royal, Virginia."

Chairman GOODLATTE. Excellent.

And the report I mentioned earlier indicates that there would be training difficulties associated with a move to Huntsville. Namely,

there are explosive contaminants in the soil—I think we’ve covered that already.

What about employees not wanting to move from Virginia to Huntsville, Alabama? If that were the case, you’d have to hire and train new employees, would you not?

Mr. BRANDON. Yes, sir. And like everywhere you have to recruit that subject-matter expertise, it’s not easy to find. And so that would be another challenge that was documented by the subject-matter experts in the report.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Do you know of any canine training facilities anywhere where the canines are imprinted that are close to Superfund sites with soil contaminated with explosive materials?

Mr. BRANDON. No, sir.

Chairman GOODLATTE. It wouldn’t work, would it?

Mr. BRANDON. That’s what was included by the subject-matter experts. They detailed that, yes, sir, that you’re correct. They said that would be problematic.

Chairman GOODLATTE. And I will yield to Mrs. Comstock again if she has any additional questions or comments.

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Sure. I would be happy to.

You know, I do think, in terms of the move, I think it’s—I imagine you have a fair amount of your employees with their expertise who are in two-earner families?

Mr. BRANDON. Ma’am, I believe so, but I don’t have a specific—

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Yeah. I know that’s something, when we were looking—and I think that’s something common in corporate America now, where it is very difficult to often move families. And I moved—my dad worked for a company where they moved him around all the time. My mom was a teacher, and, you know, she just had to go wherever he was, and she would get a teaching job. But that’s not the modern-day reality anymore. You can’t just tell whoever the expert is to pick up and go. If, you know, they’re married to a surgeon here who’s at a hospital, chances are they’re going to want to stay at the hospital. If they’re married to—you know, if they have kids, like I was, who was a senior in high school, and my dad had to move, you want to stay. Dad traveled that year, so that was nice.

But I do think that family disruption, I know that’s something we looked at even, you know, from the CIA going from Virginia to West Virginia, but I think this is very—it would be very different. And because of the unique expertise here, that takes years to establish. And because you would lose a lot of that expertise moving, I do think—I think we’ve already established it, so I’m not really asking a question, but I’m just observing that that modern-day reality of two-earner families is probably something we should emphasize more to those who are trying to move. Because I think that makes it—I see nodding heads out there too.

You know, right? Because that is the reality of families today. And to try and move and have that disruption, that’s a loss of income for the families. You know, are the houses going to sell well or not? You know, I don’t think the government has a—you know, my dad’s company, if his house didn’t sell right, they gave him a bonus, but I don’t think we do that in the government, do we?

So if you lose money on your house or you're selling your house at a bad time or something like that, that's not good either. So I think there's a lot of factors to the families and the workers involved that would be a loss to them, long term, and their employment.

I think Congressman Wolf did a very good job here of finding a unique place to put this, develop that expertise for years. And to disrupt that at this point really does not—I haven't heard of any case—well, I know there may be others who want to make the case, but I can't see where that would make any sense.

So I appreciate the details you've brought forward. And if there's maybe more on that front of how it would impact the families and how it would—I mean, the \$40 million cost, it would cost us 40 million and wouldn't—I mean, that's a pretty—I can think of a lot of other things that we're looking to spend \$40 million on in the Federal Government, not to mention the personal cost it would be to the families and the disruption there.

So I think it is pretty clear here that we need to keep this expertise here and this great facility here. And I'm happy to be here today and work with the chairman in any way we can to do so.

But if you have any comments on any of that—

Mr. BRANDON. Ma'am, I totally agree with you. My executive team and I deal with that all the time, the two—when I grew up, my dad was a World War II veteran and my mom was a bookkeeper, and it's different today. We have stories where an employee's wife is a surgeon, and so it limited his mobility. And he was saying, "Hey, my wife is a surgeon, makes a lot more money than I do."

And I also know, prior to my coming up, there was a time where we lost an employee because his wife was a doctor, and he went to another agency because he said, "Hey, I'm not going to leave where I'm at because of my wife's practice" and so forth.

So that is today's climate that we operate in, and we try to be very sensitive to that and try to make win-win situation for our employees.

Mrs. COMSTOCK. And anywhere where we might be able to detail that in more detail, I would imagine that may be a cost that really hasn't been accounted for. So there may be additional costs on that 40 million. I mean, because the cost of training somebody when you lose them has to be really bigger than where—than it's been evaluated at.

Mr. BRANDON. I think, ma'am, and the cost came out to, like, 37 million and change and then another 3 million between training and everything else that would be involved, up to, you know, the \$40 million.

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Well, thank you.

And I yield back.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Thank you.

I have one more question. We've talked a lot about the use of these dogs to solve crimes. I would say that perhaps an even greater role for them is public safety, preventing explosive devices from going off and killing people at different types of events or locations. And so, when they are called upon to come to search for explosive

devices that may not have been otherwise detected, they're doing a tremendous service to public safety.

If they're not properly trained because they're in an environment where they can't be effectively trained, is it safe to say that that could heavily impact the public safety of the people of this country? And to the extent that they're also trained to work in scores of other countries around the world, this is a major liability for public safety if we were to change this. Is that a safe statement?

Mr. BRANDON. Yes, Mr. Chairman. And I gave examples of after the crime's been committed and finding evidence. And, to your point, we informally refer to it as being on the left side of boom, which is a priority.

Recently, we had dogs up at the Boston Marathon, and I think we had five canines there. We always have them at the Super Bowl and at the request of the Secret Service during the inauguration and so forth. And they're vital. They're recognized. Our law enforcement partners wouldn't ask for our folks to come along with their canines if they weren't seen as a valuable deterrent towards preventing anything catastrophic from happening.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Thank you very much.

Deputy Director Brandon, is there anything else you'd like to add before we close?

Mr. BRANDON. No, Mr. Chairman and Congresswoman Comstock. I'd just thank you for giving me the opportunity on the great men and women of ATF. And I refer to my job as the ATF cheerleader, but it's legitimate. It's great men and women out in the street every day risking their lives. I've had a couple shot within the last few months. And we take our job very seriously. We're public servants. But our role is to protect the public and serve the Nation and be no better partner to our State, Federal, and law enforcement partners. And I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Chairman GOODLATTE. Well, thank you. And I have known you for several years. And while you do speak up well for the ATF, I just want to thank you personally for your own service and for helping to lead an organization that does do a great deal to create safety for our public.

Mr. BRANDON. Thank you, sir.

Chairman GOODLATTE. This concludes today's hearing. Thank you to our distinguished witness for attending.

And, without objection, all members will have 5 legislative days to submit additional written questions for the witness or additional materials for the record.

And, with that—I now have a gavel—this hearing is adjourned. [Whereupon, at 10:23 a.m., the Committee was adjourned.]