

**DHS'S EFFORTS TO DISRUPT TRANSNATIONAL  
CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
OVERSIGHT, MANAGEMENT,  
AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS**

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## DHS'S EFFORTS TO DISRUPT TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Wednesday, July 28, 2021

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, MANAGEMENT,  
AND ACCOUNTABILITY,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:59 p.m., via Webex, Hon. Lou Correa [Chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Correa, Titus, Meijer, Bishop, and Harshbarger.

Chairman CORREA. Good afternoon. The hearing on Committee on Homeland Security Oversight will now come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare the subcommittee in recess at any point. Let's begin by thanking everyone today for joining us.

Over the last few months, this subcommittee has had the opportunity to look closely at some of the factors that push people from Central America and Mexico to leave their homes and travel to the United States border. We have heard about crippling effects of the recent natural disasters, wide-spread poverty, COVID-19, as well as the pervasive presence of corruption which stifles progress, economic progress, and maintains inequality.

Today, I look forward to diving more deeply into some of these issues the Department of Homeland Security is working on to combat both abroad and at home, primarily violence and instability caused by transnational criminal organizations. These TCOs are far-reaching criminal enterprises that seek to profit from a wide variety of illicit schemes including drug trafficking, smuggling migrants, money laundering, and extortion. Their activities affect migration at almost every level.

These TCOs are often connected to the local gangs that spread violence and fear in Central America, providing the weapons and legitimacy that allows these gangs to continue preying on the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. This is particularly true in the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, which have some of the highest homicide rates in the world, and where this violence is disproportionately directed toward women and girls. The extortion, kidnapping, and threat of violence perpetrated by these gangs is one of the main reasons why people

leave their homes and go north. Additionally, TCOs are typically either directly connected to the groups that smuggle migrants across the borders or will allow those smugglers to pass through the territory they control for a fee, generating, of course, millions of dollars a year from the exploitations of those who seek a better life.

For many who hope to escape violence by leaving their homes, the journey can be as perilous. It is estimated that about 80 percent of the women and girls who migrate from the Northern Triangle face sexual violence along the way. Migrants are also highly susceptible to robbery and, of course, kidnapping. The same connections that allow TCOs to guarantee passage free from legal hassle also allow them to victimize migrants with impunity. Therefore, key to the success of President Biden's efforts to slow irregular migration will have to be a continued focus on the detection and disruption of these TCOs and their many illegal activities.

We have with us today two witnesses from the Department of Homeland Security to outline how they are supporting the President's goal and how they are working to implement the President's goals. For years, the Department has undertaken efforts to degrade the influence of TCOs that have in foreign countries and at the border and even in the United States created such chaos. Customs and Border Protection utilizes a combination of personnel, technology, and information gathering to monitor the flows of goods and people across the border, while Immigration and Customs Enforcement seeks to investigate the crimes perpetrated by these TCOs and ensure prosecution both at home and abroad. Additionally, DHS participates in several interagency task forces that coordinate the TCO investigation efforts of DHS, the Department of Justice, and State and local law enforcement.

Under the Biden administration, DHS will participate in two new interagency task forces to enhance enforcement efforts against human smuggling, and these are Operation Sentinel and Joint Task Force Alpha. These collaborations ensure that DHS is part of a unified effort to attack and dismantle these criminal organizations as quickly and as effectively as possible. We must remember that in these nefarious and resilient criminal networks, we must remember who the real enemy is, and not those that they leave behind in terrible situations.

[The statement of Chairman Correa follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN J. LUIS CORREA

JULY 28, 2021

Over the last few months, this subcommittee has had the opportunity to look closely at some of the factors that push the people of Central America and Mexico to leave their homes and travel to the U.S. border. We have heard about the crippling effects of recent natural disasters and wide-spread poverty, as well as the pervasive presence of corruption, which stifles progress and maintains inequality.

Today I look forward to diving more deeply into an issue that the Department of Homeland Security is working to combat both abroad and at home: The violence and instability caused by transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). TCOs are far-reaching criminal enterprises that seek to profit from a wide variety of illicit schemes including drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, money laundering, and extortion. Their activities affect migration at almost every level.

TCOs are often connected to the local gangs that spread violence and fear in Central America, providing the weapons and legitimacy that allows these gangs to continue preying on vulnerable communities. This is a particular problem in the North-

ern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, which have some of the highest homicide rates in the world, and where this violence is disproportionately directed toward women and girls. The extortion, kidnapping, and threat of violence perpetrated by these gangs is one of the main reasons why people leave their homes and migrate north. Additionally, TCOs are typically either directly connected to the groups that smuggle migrants across borders or will allow the smugglers to pass through the territory they control for a fee, generating millions of dollars a year from the exploitation of those who seek a better life.

For many who hope to escape violence by leaving their homes, the journey can prove just as perilous.

It is estimated that approximately 80 percent of women and girls who migrate from the Northern Triangle face sexual violence along the way. Migrants are also highly susceptible to robbery and kidnapping. The same connections that allow TCOs to guarantee passage free from legal hassles, also allow them to victimize migrants with impunity. Therefore, key to the success of President Biden's efforts to slow irregular migration will have to be a continued focus on the detection and disruption of these TCOs and their many illegal activities.

We have with us today two witnesses from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to outline how they are supporting the President's goal. For years, the Department has undertaken efforts to degrade the influence TCOs have in foreign countries, at the border, and even in U.S. cities. Customs and Border Protection utilizes a combination of personnel, technology, and information gathering to monitor the flow of goods and people across the border, while Immigration and Customs Enforcement seeks to investigate the crimes perpetrated by TCOs and ensure prosecution both at home and abroad.

Additionally, DHS participates in several interagency task forces that coordinate the TCO investigation efforts of DHS, the Department of Justice, and State and local law enforcement.

Under the Biden administration, DHS will participate in two new interagency task forces to enhance enforcement efforts against human smuggling: Operation Sentinel and Joint Task Force Alpha. These collaborations ensure that DHS is part of a unified effort to attack and dismantle these criminal organizations as effectively as possible. We must remember that it is these nefarious and resilient criminal networks who are the real enemy here, and not those who leave behind impossible situations in the hope for something better.

Chairman CORREA. With that, I want to thank you for joining us today. Now, I would like to recognize the Ranking Member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Michigan, Mr. Meijer, for an opening statement.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today, and I look forward to having a frank and in-depth discussion with our witnesses. I hope we can delve into the reality of the situation in the Northern Triangle and get a better sense of the threat that these transnational criminal organizations, or TCOs as the Chairman mentioned, pose to the region and how they are fueling the exodus of families and civilians across our Southern Border.

While this is the third hearing that our subcommittee has held on the Northern Triangle region in an effort to better understand the range of push factors contributing to migration, this is the first one we have had with Government witnesses. This allows us the chance to hear directly from CBP and HSI about the threat posed by TCOs in the area and the affect that they are having on citizens in those countries as they travel through Mexico and to our Southern Border.

As I stated in the first hearing, this administration has compounded the problem at the border by failing to adequately dissuade those who seek to illegally cross. Although I do not fault those who seek a better life for their families, we now find ourselves in a border crisis where too many individuals and families have been making that choice to enter the United States illegally at the encouragement of the administration.

On July 14, we passed a threshold of over 1 million border crossings in the last fiscal year. There are many reasons why people in the Northern Triangle choose to migrate, and we have discussed those at length in previous hearings. But it is clear that many actions taken by the administration have resulted in this crisis. On June 15, the administration provided an update on the actions that have been taken to improve the border crisis and highlighted a number of accomplishments, including a significant reduction in the number of unaccompanied children being held in Customs and Border Protection facilities. What that announcement failed to mention, however, is the issue has not been resolved. Just last month, we hit an unfortunate new record of over 15,000 unaccompanied minors who were encountered by CBP at the border. The bottleneck has simply been shifted from CBP to Health and Human Services and disbursed throughout the country including in our third Congressional district.

HHS is now responsible for housing these unaccompanied minors. In the first hearing on the topic that we held, the subcommittee heard from Sheriff Steve Hinkley of Calhoun County, Michigan, in our district, as he described the strain that the shift in administration policy has placed on local law enforcement and the lack of coordination and assistance provided by the Federal Government in enacting this new procedure. Unfortunately, there are instances of unaccompanied minors, as well as adults, arriving at our Southern Border as a result of human trafficking operations. I look forward to engaging with our witnesses today to learn more about their agency's efforts to combat criminal organizations in the region that conduct these operations and determine what additional resources DHS may need in order to prevent future humanitarian and security crises in the region. I am hopeful we will use this opportunity today to engage on specific strategies and potential solutions that Congress and the administration can pursue together in order to productively address these challenges in a responsible and effective way.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, again, for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

[The statement of Ranking Member Meijer follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER PETER MELJER

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today.

I look forward to having a frank and in-depth discussion with our witnesses today, and I hope we can delve into the reality of the situation in the Northern Triangle and get a better sense of the threat that these Transnational Criminal Organizations, or TCOs, pose to the region and how they are fueling the exodus of families and civilians from the area to our Southern Border.

While this is the third hearing that this subcommittee has held on the Northern Triangle region in an effort to better understand the range of push factors that contribute to migration, this is the first one we've had with Government witnesses. This allows us the chance to hear directly from CBP and HSI about the threat posed by TCOs in the area and the effect they have on citizens of those countries as they travel through Mexico to our Southern Border.

As I stated in the first hearing, this administration has compounded the problem at the border by failing to adequately dissuade those who want to illegally cross our borders. Although I do not fault those who seek a better life for their families, we now find ourselves in a border crisis where too many individuals and families have been making the choice to enter the United States illegally at the encouragement of the administration.



On July 14, we passed the threshold of 1 million border crossings in the last fiscal year. There are many reasons why people in the Northern Triangle choose to migrate, and we have discussed those at length in the previous hearings. It is clear, however, that many actions taken by this administration have resulted in the crisis we're still seeing today.

On June 15, the administration provided an update on the actions that have been taken to improve the border crisis and highlighted a number of accomplishments, including a significant reduction in the number of unaccompanied children being held in Customs and Border Protection facilities. What the administration's announcement fails to mention, however, is that the issue has not been resolved. Just last month, we hit an unfortunate new record of 15,253 unaccompanied minors who were encountered by CBP at the border.

The bottleneck has simply been shifted from CBP to Health and Human Services, which is now responsible for housing unaccompanied minors around the country, including at a facility in my district. In the first hearing on this topic, this committee heard from Sheriff Steve Hinkley of Calhoun County Michigan, as he described the strain that the shift in administration policy has placed on local law enforcement, and the lack of coordination and assistance provided by the Federal Government in enacting this new procedure.

Unfortunately, there are instances of unaccompanied minors, as well as adults, arriving at our Southern Border as a result of human trafficking operations. I am looking forward to engaging with our witnesses today to learn more about their agencies' efforts to combat criminal organizations in the region that conduct these kinds of operations and determine what additional resources DHS may need to prevent future humanitarian and security crises in the region.

I am hopeful that we will use this opportunity today to engage on specific strategies and potential solutions that Congress and the administration can pursue together in order to productively address these challenges in a responsible and effective way.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

Chairman CORREA. I thank the Ranking Member. Members are also reminded that the committee will operate according to the guidelines laid out by the Chairman and Ranking Member in their February 3 colloquy regarding remote procedures. The Chair now recognizes the Chairman of the full committee, which is not here. So, we move on to the Ranking Member, also not here. Statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Chairman Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BENNIE G. THOMPSON

JULY 28, 2021

As the subcommittee has learned through its recent hearings, many of the root causes of migration from Central America are interrelated. Transnational criminal organizations are an example. Violence fueled by these organizations' efforts to control migration routes in the region has led to some of the highest crime rates in the world. Crime has caused thousands to flee in fear of their lives, especially minors who are often targeted by local gangs.

The ability of criminal organizations to bribe government officials and exploit weak judicial systems in Central American countries allows them to operate with impunity. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has had long-standing efforts focused on addressing the many threats transnational criminal organizations pose to the United States. But actions by the Trump administration to dismantle some of these efforts may have limited the Department's effectiveness. For example, we now know that President Trump's DHS worked to undermine—and ultimately shutdown—a joint task force that coordinated Department-wide efforts to address border threats.

Repeated cuts to U.S. foreign assistance in Central America and failure to hold corrupt politicians accountable also made conditions in the region worse over the past 4 years. The influx of migrants to the U.S. Southern Border created new opportunities for criminal enterprises. Smugglers are charging large sums to help desperate migrants make the journey north. In turn, these payments fund fees charged by the larger criminal organizations who control access to key border crossing

routes. Sadly, we have all heard too many stories of migrants being assaulted, robbed, or abandoned along the way.

I applaud the Biden administration for taking action to address these challenges and to strengthen DHS's capacity to combat criminal organizations. In April, Secretary Mayorkas announced the creation of Operation Sentinel, a collaborative effort led by U.S. Customs and Border Protection to counter migrant smuggling operations. In June, the Department of Justice formed a joint task force with DHS to enhance U.S. law enforcement efforts against human smuggling and trafficking groups operating in Mexico and the Northern Triangle.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about these initiatives and ways Congress can support DHS's efforts to combat transnational criminal organizations and further strengthen border security.

Chairman CORREA. OK. What I would like to do is now move to welcoming our witnesses. The first witness we have is Mr. Francis Russo. He is the acting deputy executive assistant commissioner for operation support at the Customs and Border Protection Office. In his role, he supports CBP operations across 8 subcomponents, including offices of intelligence, international affairs. Mr. Russo has served in multiple roles since joining Customs Service in 1995, including as assistant director for border security in the New York Field Office.

Our second witness is Mr. John Condon. Mr. Condon is the acting assistant director for Homeland Security Investigations international operations within Immigration and Customs Enforcement. He is responsible for 81 international offices in 53 countries. His responsibilities include planning, directing, managing, and coordinating all policies, procedures, and guidelines concerning international investigative activities. He previously served in several roles including ICE's regional attaché for the Caribbean. Without objection, the witnesses' full statements will be inserted into the record. I now ask each witness to summarize their statements in 5 minutes beginning with Mr. Russo. Welcome, sir.

**STATEMENT OF FRANCIS J. RUSSO, ACTING DEPUTY EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, OPERATIONS SUPPORT, U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION**

Mr. RUSSO. Good afternoon, Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Meijer, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about transnational organized crime in Central America and U.S. Customs and Border Protection's efforts to dismantle it.

As you are aware, transnational criminal organizations, or TCOs, are heavily involved in smuggling a combination of human beings, weapons cache, or narcotics. Essentially, anything with a high profit margin. They operate seamlessly across international borders exploiting supply chains, financial flows, corrupt officials, and overburdened law enforcement without regard for human life. They pose a clear threat to National security and public safety.

It is estimated that TCOs profit anywhere from \$200 million to \$2.3 billion alone for smuggling migrants from the Northern Triangle to the Southwest Border. Desperate migrants pay TCO-connected human smuggling groups thousands of dollars to aid on their journey to escape violence, natural disasters, food insecurity, and poverty at home. Smugglers control where these illegal border crossings occur, often abandoning migrants in remote and dangerous areas. Last month, CBP conducted 9,500 rescues in these

areas and rescued 81 percent more individuals this year than last fiscal year. Unfortunately, we have also confirmed 300 deaths this year.

This callous activity creates border security gaps that TCOs seek to exploit. While agents are busy processing large groups or rescuing migrants, TCOs move illicit narcotics or other contraband elsewhere across the border.

CBP leverages key partnerships and sound analytics to combat TCOs. Joint Task Force Alpha, our newest initiative, includes partnerships with Federal prosecutors along the Southwest Border supported by law enforcement agents and analysts from ICE and CBP. The task force is enhancing the Department of Justice's ability to investigate and prosecute the most prolific and dangerous human smuggling and trafficking groups operating in Mexico and the Northern Triangle. Complementing Task Force Alpha, Operation Sentinel is a CPB-led initiative to counter TCOs affiliated with migrant smuggling. It is supported by ICE, USCIS, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. DEA, and the FBI.

The operation targets and disrupts those individuals responsible for sending structured payments facilitating human smuggling. We are mapping the networks while targeting their members, associates, and their assets. Examples include revocation of travel documents, suspension and debarment, and freezing of bank accounts and other financial assets tied to TCO logistical networks. To date, Operation Sentinel has yielded the revocation of more than 150 visas associated with TCO members and their associates, preventing these individuals from traveling to the United States or using their visas to enter foreign countries. In addition, our foreign partners have frozen overseas bank accounts, curbing the ability of TCOs to access the proceeds of their illicit activities.

Operation Sentinel has identified multiple businesses for suspension or debarment, precluding those associated with TCOs and their affiliates from participating in Federal programs.

To support Operation Sentinel, CBP recently announced the partnership with the National Insurance Crime Bureau to prevent companies linked to migrant smuggling from securing insurance for their commercial enterprises. NICB's network of 1,200 companies includes more than 80 percent of the Nation's property-casualty insurance companies. Their partnership, combined with CBP's suspension and debarment program protects the public interest, the public's money, and the integrity of Federal programs by ensuring that Federal agencies only conduct business with those engaged in lawful enterprise.

Starting in June, CBP personnel deployed to Guatemala to provide advisory and capacity-building expertise to the government of Guatemala to improve border security efforts, target human smuggling groups, and enhance trade and customs modernization. The initiative coordinated closely with the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement seeks to manage migration and the growing number of non-citizen unaccompanied children transiting through and from Guatemala.

In addition, CBP's National Targeting Center known as the NTC in Sterling, Virginia uses Classified law enforcement commercial and open-source information in innovative ways to identify high-

risk travelers and shipments at the earliest point possible to mitigate threats at and beyond the border. The NTC collaborates closely with Federal, State, and local partners including HSI's Human Smuggling Unit to dismantle special interest migrant facilitation networks prioritized for action through ICE, HSI's Extraterritorial Criminal Travel program. Finally, the NTC actively participates in the transnational organize crime watch-listing program, accounting for a large percentage of all U.S. Government nominations to the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Russo follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF FRANCIS J. RUSSO

JULY 28, 2021

Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Meijer, and Members of the subcommittee, it is my honor to appear before you today to discuss the threats posed to the United States by transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) efforts to disrupt and dismantle them.

THE THREAT OF TCO S AND MIGRANT SMUGGLING

The United States faces persistent threats from innovative and constantly-evolving transnational criminal networks whose collaborative efforts seek to gain illicit financial benefits by causing harm, inflicting damage, corrupting officials, undermining security efforts, and degrading the State. These international networks, one subset of which are known as TCOs, adjust organizationally and shift alliances to acquire new specialized talent, sources, and access privileges to improve long-term earnings, efficiencies, and operations. Successful TCOs exploit existing logistical chains and financial flows and diversify their portfolios to move multiple illicit items such as drugs, money, counterfeit goods, individuals, and weapons. TCOs conduct their operations without regard for human life and have proven to be highly capable, profitable, powerful, dangerous, elusive, and extremely resilient. In short, TCOs pose a significant threat to both National security and to public safety.

Human smugglers—many with ties to TCOs—engage in the crime of unlawfully bringing people into the United States, or unlawfully transporting and harboring people already in the United States, in deliberate evasion of immigration law. It is estimated that TCOs profit anywhere between \$200 million and \$2.3 billion alone for smuggling migrants from the Northern Triangle to the Southwest Border.<sup>1</sup> Desperate migrants often pay human smuggling groups thousands of dollars to aid them on their journey. These smugglers and TCOs profit by exploiting people who are seeking a better life. Violence, natural disasters, food insecurity, and poverty have long existed in Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries of Central America, all of which have become more severe during the COVID-19 pandemic. TCOs exploit these trends and deceive desperate people about our country's laws, while also abusing and exploiting them on their journey north. While the number of CBP encounters along the Southwest Border dropped dramatically in fiscal year 2020 over the previous year's numbers, the number of encounters for fiscal year 2021 to date is higher than all of fiscal year 2019, which were the highest in about a decade. In June, CBP migrant encounters jumped to over 188,000 people. Thirty-four percent of encounters in June 2021 were individuals who had at least one prior encounter in the previous 12 months, compared to an average 1-year re-encounter rate of 14 percent for fiscal years 2014–2019. The number of unique new encounters in June 2021 was 123,838. The number of unique individuals encountered to date during the fiscal year is 454,944 compared to 489,760 during the same time period in 2019.

Many who make the journey become sick, injured, or traumatized. Some even lose their lives. Alarming, transnational smuggling organizations often abandon migrants in remote and dangerous areas, leading to a dramatic rise in the number of rescues CBP performs. In June 2021, CBP conducted 9,500 rescues Nation-wide and has rescued 81 percent more individuals in fiscal year 2021 than all of fiscal year

<sup>1</sup>See, <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2019/04/22.html>.

2020. Despite these successful rescues, many other migrants fail to get the help they need in time. CBP has confirmed over 300 migrant deaths so far in fiscal year 2021, compared to 250 in all of fiscal year 2020. Around a third of these are heat-related deaths in the dangerous terrain of the desert, mountains, or brush. Around 18 percent are water-related, often in the rivers and canals that make up our border with Mexico.

Human smuggling poses a substantial threat to the homeland by creating conduits that allow contraband and persons seeking to harm the United States to clandestinely enter the country. Smugglers control where and how these illegal migrant border crossings take place, putting human lives at risk to create gaps in border security. While agents are diverted to process large groups or to conduct migrant rescues, TCOs are using these diversions to move illicit narcotics or other contraband elsewhere across the border. These same TCOs, through diversified criminal activities, are responsible for the movement of illicit drugs entering the United States. Of note, CBP continues to see a surge in fentanyl seizures, with fiscal year 2021 seizures through June 2021 78 percent greater than all of fiscal year 2020. The TCOs often use many of the same resources and logistical nodes to move proceeds from their illicit activities from the United States to Mexico. TCOs continually adjust their operations to avoid detection and interdiction by law enforcement, and—like legitimate businesses—are quick to take advantage of improved technology, cheaper transportation, and better distribution methods.

#### CBP'S RESPONSE

To confront TCOs and other threat networks, CBP has embraced a counter-network approach. This effort leverages CBP's unique authorities, data holdings, Intelligence Enterprise, and partnerships to illuminate, disrupt, degrade, and dismantle networks that pose a threat to the homeland and its interests. CBP's international collaboration and integration with the interagency counter-network community optimizes the collective global effort, which identifies options for intelligence-driven, risk-mitigating responses.

Our success at identifying, degrading, and disrupting transnational networks depends on our ability to execute CBP's counter-network approach on two fronts—partnerships and sound analytical methodology. On the former, CBP front-line agents, officers, trade, and intelligence professionals must work hand-in-hand with the whole of Government, as well as international partners. On the latter, CBP must have the systems and processes in place to efficiently detect, collect, and analyze threat network data, and the ability to rapidly respond with intelligence-driven operations. Developing these relationships and capabilities, together with taking these actions will enable CBP to proactively identify and stop threats before they arrive at U.S. borders.

#### *Partnerships*

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and CBP are partnering with the U.S. Attorney General in a new initiative—Joint Task Force Alpha—that is combining the investigative, prosecutorial, and capacity-building efforts of both DHS and the Department of Justice (DOJ). Joint Task Force Alpha was recently formed to investigate and prosecute the most prolific and dangerous human smuggling and trafficking groups operating in Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.<sup>2</sup> The task force consists of Federal prosecutors along the Southwest Border along with law enforcement agents and analysts from DHS's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and CBP. The FBI and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) are also task force members, which is seeking to enhance the DOJ's on-going efforts to fight corruption in Northern Triangle countries. The Justice Department is increasing its focus on investigations, prosecutions, and asset recoveries relating to corruption in the Northern Triangle through its Foreign Corrupt Practices Act enforcement program, counter-narcotics prosecutions, and Kleptocracy Asset Recovery Initiative. In addition, adopting a task force approach, the Department of Justice's Office of Prosecutorial Development (OPDAT) and International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program personnel—including new Northern Triangle anti-corruption legal advisors—are working with Northern Triangle prosecutors and investigators to build corruption cases in those countries themselves, as well as to develop leads that can be pursued by the Kleptocracy Asset Recovery Initiative.

<sup>2</sup> See, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-announces-initiatives-combat-human-smuggling-and-trafficking-and-fight>.

Task Force Alpha is working closely with Operation Sentinel, a recently-announced DHS operation focused on countering TCOs affiliated with migrant smuggling. CBP has taken the lead on Operation Sentinel, which is a collaborative effort with ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the U.S. Department of State, the FBI, and DEA.

Partners in Operation Sentinel are targeting all personnel and identifiable resources that TCOs require to operate. One of the main lines of effort for Operation Sentinel is to target and disrupt those individuals responsible for sending structured payments for human smuggling, which may include proceeds from illicit drugs. Utilizing the full breadth of domestic and foreign authorities, data, analytic capability and capacity, Operation Sentinel is mapping the organizations' networks; targeting their members, associates, and assets; and employing a series of targeted actions and sanctions against them. Examples of these actions include:

- Revocation of travel documents
- Suspension and debarment
- Freezing of bank accounts and other financial assets tied to TCO logistical networks.

To date, Operation Sentinel partners in the State Department have revoked more than 150 visas associated with TCO members and their associates, preventing these individuals from traveling to the United States and from using their U.S. visas as entry documents in foreign countries. Operation Sentinel has also identified multiple entities for U.S. Government-wide suspension and/or debarment, which would preclude TCO members, their affiliates, and their associated businesses from Federal programs. The operation has also worked with foreign partners to freeze overseas accounts, curbing TCOs' ability to send and receive the financial proceeds of their illicit activities.

To complement Operation Sentinel, CBP also recently announced a partnership with the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) to prevent companies associated with smuggling migrants into the United States from securing insurance for their commercial enterprises. The NICB is the insurance industry's premier association dedicated to predicting, preventing, and prosecuting insurance crime. Their extensive network of more than 1,200 member companies includes more than 80 percent of the Nation's property-casualty insurance companies. Following CBP's determination to suspend or debar a particular company or individual, NICB will inform their members of the suspended or debarred entity. The Government-wide suspension and debarment system exists to protect the public interest, the public's money, and the integrity of Federal programs by ensuring that Federal agencies only conduct business with presently responsible persons.

In addition to Task Force Alpha and Operational Sentinel, DHS also commissioned a comprehensive plan led by both CBP and ICE-HSI to disrupt the illicit flow of firearms, firearms components, and ammunition from the United States into Mexico. The culmination, known as Operation Without a Trace, provides a joint platform for CBP and ICE-HSI personnel to target, and investigate the financing, transportation, and communications methods employed by firearms procurement and smuggling networks to disrupt and dismantle their illegal gun trafficking operations. This is done in collaboration with the Department of Justice's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. Under Without a Trace, ICE and CBP launched a public information campaign, including public service announcements in land and air ports of entry, to publicize the scope and results of Operation Without a Trace and to increase public awareness about how to provide confidential tips regarding cross-border weapons trafficking activities. Since the initiative's inception in fiscal year 2020, Operation Without a Trace has achieved significant success preventing Mexico-bound gun trafficking, resulting in the initiation of 353 investigations, the execution of 227 arrests, the service of 62 search warrants, and the seizure of 542 firearms, nearly 500,000 rounds of ammunition, and \$16.5 million in illicit currency.

In partnership with the Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, CBP is supporting the United States' initiative to address the root causes of irregular migration from Central America. In coordination with the Vice President of the United States' visit to Guatemala, CBP personnel deployed to Guatemala in early June to provide advisory and capacity-building expertise to the government of Guatemala to improve border security efforts, target human smuggling groups, and enhance trade and customs modernization. The initiative, known as the Guatemala Advisory Assistance Root Causes Deployment, is in response to the National Security Council request for a 90-day plan to manage migration and the growing number of noncitizen unaccompanied children transiting through and sourcing out of Guatemala.

CBP also continues to collaborate with the government of Mexico on border security matters, irregular migration flows, and efforts to enhance bilateral information sharing, targeting, and mentoring. On June 29, CBP hosted an engagement between Acting Commissioner Miller and a delegation from the Mexican Embassy led by Ambassador Esteban Moctezuma Barragán to discuss dynamic information and knowledge sharing to identify, disrupt, and manage cross-border risks. CBP continues to engage government of Mexico counterparts to share information and jointly target human smuggling networks and transnational criminal organizations.

#### *Sound Analytical Methodology*

Sound analytical methodology centers on providing timely and actionable intelligence to our front-line officer and agents, decision makers, and partners. To strengthen our intelligence posture in responding to this complex threat environment, CBP's Intelligence Enterprise (IE) was established in 2017 as a cohesive, threat-based, data-driven, and operationally-focused effort to leverage the collective intelligence capabilities and expertise across CBP's operational components, including Air and Marine Operations (AMO), Office of Field Operations, Office of Trade, and USBP.

To enhance its intelligence capacity, the CBP IE established investment priorities that support a whole-of-agency approach to countering various border threats, such as the use of a common reporting platform to timely share and disseminate threat information to disparate offices. CBP's IE was also responsible for launching the CBP Watch, a situational awareness facility that provides trend analysis and real-time feedback to better support the Agency's operational front line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

CBP's National Targeting Center (NTC) is another critical component of our comprehensive, analytical border security and management strategy. The NTC emphasizes partnerships, both cultivating new ones and maintaining existing relationships. It provides real-time actionable information to strategic foreign and domestic partners through such programs as the Container Security Initiative, Immigration Advisory Program/Joint Security Program, International Targeting Center, and liaison locations abroad. CBP's NTC hosts liaisons in Sterling, Virginia from key agencies and international partners to actively share critical information. Over two dozen domestic and foreign partners are represented at the NTC.

These programs and partnerships effectively enhance global domain awareness and targeting capabilities while enabling the interdiction of travel and cargo threats at their origin. The NTC coordinates mitigation efforts across agencies and foreign partners to interdict high-risk shipments and uses risk-based strategies to identify TCOs and drug trafficking organizations. The NTC uses tools such as the Automated Targeting System and subject-matter expertise to analyze, assess, and segment risk at every state of the trade and travel life cycles. It uses Classified law enforcement, commercial, and open-source information in innovative ways to identify high-risk travelers and shipments at the earliest point possible and coordinates with CBP staff as well as interagency and foreign partners to take appropriate action.

Currently, the NTC is supporting over 20 transnational organized crime-related investigations encompassing all organizational elements (e.g., command/control/finance/logistics). The NTC is also collaborating on over 50 trade-based money-laundering cases and supporting OFAC designations under the Foreign Kingpin Act. The NTC closely collaborates with HSI's Human Smuggling Unit in the identification, analysis, disruption, and dismantling of special interest migrant facilitation networks prioritized for interagency action through HSI's Extraterritorial Criminal Travel program. Finally, the NTC actively participates in the transnational organized crime watch-listing program.

CBP is also working to increase detection of threats from transnational organized crime before they arrive at the U.S. borders by closing gaps in domain awareness in the air, land, and maritime environments. AMO's Air and Marine Operations Center (AMOC) manages the air and maritime domain awareness of the Department, and is critical in detecting, identifying, and coordinating a response to threats to National security. The use of tools such as the Air and Marine Operations Surveillance System integrates various radar feeds into a consolidated system that provides both air and marine track data, thus providing air and maritime situational awareness that can inform operations and is shared with strategic partners.

In fiscal year 2020, AMOC successfully evaluated detections of over 300,000 air targets. These capabilities will continue to increase the information and data collection that helps feed the CBP intelligence cycle for analysis and building a comprehensive understanding of the logistical supply chains TCOs use to further illicit activity. From these activities CBP is actively engaged in addressing the key mari-

time and air threat areas of San Diego, Puerto Rico/Caribbean, the Pacific Northwest, the Great Lakes, and the Gulf of Mexico with these varying technologies. In particular, maritime smuggling on the Southern California coastline has been on the rise. Between fiscal year 2019 and fiscal year 2020, San Diego Sector experienced a 92 percent increase of apprehensions in the maritime domain. San Diego Sector has made over 900 arrests to date this fiscal year, putting CBP on track for an additional 40 percent increase by the end of the fiscal year. Finally, in January 2021, AMO, in coordination with Joint Interagency Task Force—South (JIATF-S) and Servicio Nacional Aeronaval, conducted an integrated air and sea operation in Panama for 84 days utilizing Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) technology to detect, identify, and facilitate the interdiction of maritime surface vessels attempting to use the Eastern Pacific and Panamanian Territorial Waters to smuggle people and contraband. This operation resulted in 539 mission hours, and 9,995 pounds of cocaine and 10,210 pounds of marijuana seized or disrupted.

#### CONCLUSION

TCOs pose a significant threat to U.S. National security, and acute dangers to migrants as TCOs not only seek to profit from their exploitation but also have little regard for their well-being, exposing them to violent encounters, injury, and death. TCOs are directly involved in sexual assaults, human trafficking, and abandonment of vulnerable migrants—including minor children.

CBP continues to work closely with its National and international partners on multiple levels to identify and disrupt the illicit activities and lucrative profits of TCOs. This layered approach reduces our dependence on any one point of contact or program to stop the flow of narcotics, people, and other contraband, and extends our zone of security outward, ensuring our physical border is neither the first nor the last line of defense. Through a series of administrative and enforcement actions, CBP has improved its sources and information-collection methodology related to foreign operations. We will continue to use this information to strengthen our ability to identify and interdict not only narcotics, but also other illicit and unsafe products and people that would harm Americans.

As the Nation's largest law enforcement agency, CBP must always operate within legal boundaries to guard U.S. borders against those who operate outside of the law. CBP must lead the Nation in developing a well-informed, agile, and seamless global network that will inform and inspire integration, cooperation, and comprehensive actions. This network must be able to persistently evolve its capabilities to serve common interests in combating terrorism and violent extremism and defining, prioritizing, and disrupting TCOs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Russo. I now call on Mr. Condon to summarize his comments in 5 minutes. Welcome, sir.

#### **STATEMENT OF JOHN A. CONDON, ACTING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS, HOMELAND SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS, U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

Mr. CONDON. Thank you, sir. Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Meijer, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. Today, I will focus on the role U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations plays in identifying, disrupting, and dismantling transnational criminal organizations associated with the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

As the principal investigative component of the Department of Homeland Security, HSI conducts criminal investigations into the illegal movement of goods, money, technology, people, and contraband into and out of and throughout the United States. HSI has more than 10,000 employees in over 200 cities Nation-wide and 81 locations around the world.



In the Northern Triangle, HSI has attaché offices in Guatemala City, Guatemala, San Salvador, El Salvador, and Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Each of the Northern Triangle attaché offices also has a Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit, or TCIU, made up of foreign law enforcement, customs and immigration officials, and prosecutors who undergo a strict vetting process and complete robust training. HSI works with TCIU personnel to provide intelligence and resources to allow our partners to take enforcement actions under their country's authorities.

The close relationship built by HSI's TCIU program have led to unique opportunities to share information with Northern Triangle law enforcement counterparts. Operation Gatehouse is an initiative that deploys TCIU officers from the Northern Triangle countries to the United States and to assist HSI offices and Federal, State, and local partners with investigating MS-13 members. Pushing our borders out to address threats before they reach the United States is a priority for HSI.

Through our Operation Citadel, HSI identifies, disrupts, and dismantles TCOs and terrorist support networks by targeting mechanisms used to move migrants, illicit funds, and contraband throughout the region. Citadel provides training and capacity-building including using cross border operations to enhance foreign partners' investigative and information-sharing capabilities. Through the Biometric Identification Transnational Migration Alert program, also known as BITMAP, HSI trains and equips foreign law enforcement officers to collect biometric and biographic data on suspects of interest. Foreign law enforcement partners share their BITMAP information with HSI and this data is used to populate U.S. databases to identify transnational criminals, known or suspected terrorists, and gang members and prevent their travel to the United States.

HSI's National Air Trafficking Initiative, or NATI, addresses the transportation of narcotics from source countries to the United States by air, which is the preferred method of smuggling by many Colombian and Mexican drug cartels. HSI disrupts these smugglings routes by shutting down the transshipment of cocaine through Guatemala and Belize. NATI has resulted in historic interdictions, arrests, and seizures striking a serious blow to TCOs exploiting our Nation's borders.

To complement its international focus, HSI's efforts continue at our domestic field offices where HSI special agents respond to and investigate criminal schemes that are encountered or identified in the United States. HSI special agents combat narcotics smuggling by launching complex criminal investigations to take down sophisticated networks that produce, transport, broker, finance, and sell and distribute drugs. HSI further disrupts TCO operations by identifying and seizing the significant currency and assets attained through their criminal activities.

TCOs also require a steady supply of firearms and ammunition. HSI special agents investigate criminal organizations responsible for financing, procurement, brokering, transportation, and dissemination of firearms in support of these TCOs. These efforts take weapons off our streets and prevent the smuggling of U.S. arms. HSI and its partners have dismantled pipelines used to smuggle

undocumented noncitizens through Central and South America, seized millions of dollars from entities actively violating U.S. immigration and money-laundering statutes, and dismantled networks of transportation and harboring cells that endanger undocumented noncitizens by exposure, abandonment, or unsafe transportation methods.

Joint Task Force Alpha, JTFA, initiated by DOJ and launched with DHS, is a multi-agency operation to dismantle TCOs engaged in human smuggling in Mexico and/or through the Northern Triangle to the United States via the Southwest Border. HSI is a partner in JTFA and has identified dozens of smuggling organizations that have been designated as significant priority cases for this initiative.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your continued support of HSI and the critical investigative role it plays in investigating the TCOs that facilitate and profit from our cross-border crimes. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Condon follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHN A. CONDON

WEDNESDAY, JULY 28, 2021

#### INTRODUCTION

Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Meijer, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and Accountability: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the efforts of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) to secure the homeland from transnational crime and threats. My statement will focus on the important role HSI plays internationally and domestically in identifying, disrupting, and dismantling transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) emanating from and associated with the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

#### THE HSI MISSION

As the principal investigative component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), HSI is a premier global law enforcement organization responsible for conducting Federal criminal investigations into the illegal cross-border movement of goods, money, technology, people, and other contraband into, out of, and throughout the United States. HSI's workforce consists of more than 10,000 employees, including special agents, criminal analysts, and mission support personnel assigned to over 220 cities across the United States and over 81 locations around the world.

In collaboration with its strategic partners in the United States and abroad, HSI special agents gather evidence used to identify and build criminal cases against TCOs, terrorist networks and facilitators, and other criminal elements that threaten the homeland. HSI works with prosecutors to indict and arrest violators, execute criminal search warrants, seize criminally-derived money and assets, and take other actions designed to disrupt and dismantle criminal organizations operating around the world. These efforts protect the National security and public safety of the United States.

#### THE NATURE OF THE THREAT

TCOs represent a significant threat to our Nation and our communities. During the last two decades, TCOs have expanded dramatically in size, scope, and impact, which poses a significant threat to National security. HSI is deep focused on the threat of TCOs and targets TCOs at every critical location in the cycle: Internationally, in cooperation with foreign counterparts, where transnational criminal and terrorist organizations operate; at our Nation's physical border and ports of entry, in coordination with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), where the smugglers attempt to exploit America's legitimate trade, travel, and transportation systems; and in cities throughout the United States, where criminal organizations earn substantial profits off of their illicit activities.

Mexico is a major source of production, as well as a transit country, for illicit drugs destined for the United States, including marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and, more recently, fentanyl. Mexico is not only a source of fentanyl production; it is also a transit country for fentanyl and precursor chemicals originating from Asia. In the last two decades, Mexico has also become the largest transit country for South American-sourced cocaine destined for the United States. The Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala) countries serve as transit points for these drugs. Often, aircraft are used to transport narcotics from Venezuela and Colombia, destined to Honduras and Guatemala, for subsequent land transportation through Mexico and into the United States.

Transnational gangs from this region represent another threat to our Nation's safety and security. La Mara Salvatrucha, also known as "MS-13," is a gang operating throughout the United States and Northern Triangle countries. Members and associates of MS-13 are expected to protect the name, reputation, and status of the gang from rival gang members and other persons. MS-13 members require that all individuals show respect and deference to the gang and its membership. To accomplish this, MS-13 members and associates are expected to use any means necessary to force respect from those who show disrespect, including acts of intimidation and violence. HSI-led investigations have linked MS-13 gang members to a variety of organized criminal activity, including drug trafficking, extortion, and homicide.

Another significant concern for our country, human smuggling, involves the provision of a service—typically transportation, navigation, or fraudulent documents—to facilitate an individual's unauthorized entry into the United States. Harsh terrains and travel conditions, combined with the potential detection by law enforcement and the threat of violence posed by cartels controlling territory along smuggling routes across Central America and Mexico, make it difficult for migrants to travel from their home countries and reach our borders without the assistance of human smugglers. Criminal organizations play a major role in facilitating the smuggling of these noncitizens from their home countries and across our borders. U.S.-bound human smuggling and related criminal activities are estimated by the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center to produce revenues of between \$2 billion to \$6 billion per year.

While human smuggling may constitute the initial crime facilitating the illicit movement of people to our borders, the criminality does not stop there. In some cases, migrants become victims of human trafficking—a crime of exploitation that does not require movement—when criminal networks introduce force, fraud, or coercion into smuggling schemes to induce victims into forced labor or commercial sex acts.

HSI's investigations have also demonstrated that perpetrators of human smuggling and trafficking often concurrently or subsequently commit other transnational crimes such as gang activity, identity, and benefit fraud, money laundering, bulk cash smuggling, narcotics smuggling, arms trafficking, and terrorism and other National security-related crime.

#### HSI RESPONSE TO TCO S

The multi-faceted, complex, transnational nature of the crimes surrounding TCOs requires an equally robust and layered investigative response, which HSI implements on multiple fronts. This starts abroad, where HSI has the largest international investigative presence within DHS, comprised of 81 offices in 53 countries with 41 visa security screening posts. This wide-spread presence continues domestically, where HSI special agents and criminal analysts respond to and pursue investigations into transnational organized crime. Both at home and abroad, HSI special agents utilize a broad and unique range of legal authorities; leverage strategic relationships; and provide resources, technology, and training in support of a whole-of-Government approach to combating the TCO threat.

#### *International Operations*

HSI's international presence is a key facet of its approach to countering transnational organized crime. HSI special agents abroad develop and foster relationships with host government law enforcement partners to exchange information, coordinate and support investigations, and facilitate enforcement actions and prosecutions to deter the ability of TCOs to smuggle drugs, people, and other contraband into and out of the United States. HSI and its foreign counterparts identify and target sources of supply and identify and disrupt transportation and smuggling routes. These efforts enable HSI and its partners to prevent dangerous narcotics and other illicit goods from reaching our borders, or to stop illicit southbound flows of illegally-derived currency or weapons.

HSI maintains three attaché offices in the Northern Triangle countries—HSI Guatemala City, HSI San Salvador and HSI Tegucigalpa—and is expanding the HSI footprint in these locations.

Each of the Northern Triangle Attaché offices has a Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit (TCIU), funded by HSI, which plays a critical role in its law enforcement efforts within the region. In 2011, HSI established the TCIU program to increase its reach in the fight against TCOs. HSI TCIUs comprise foreign law enforcement officials, customs officers, immigration officers, and prosecutors who undergo a strict vetting process and complete robust training. HSI TCIUs facilitate information exchange and rapid bilateral investigations involving violations that HSI has the authority to investigate, including narcotics smuggling; human smuggling and trafficking; weapons trafficking; money laundering and bulk cash smuggling; and other transnational criminal activity. More than 430 vetted and trained foreign law enforcement officers comprise the 13 TCIUs throughout the world. HSI special agents are uniquely positioned to partner with TCIU personnel to provide critical intelligence and resources to allow our partners to take appropriate enforcement action under the authority of the host country.

The Northern Triangle TCIUs have achieved significant law enforcement success in concert with HSI. In fiscal year 2020, pursuant to investigations and operations targeting transnational criminal activity, the HSI Guatemala City TCIU, the largest in the Northern Triangle, made 599 arrests, and seized \$1,036,206 USD, 31,164.78 pounds of cocaine, 11 aircraft, 17 firearms, and 10 vehicles. In fiscal year 2020, the HSI San Salvador TCIU made 94 arrests and seized \$52,499 USD, 121 pounds of cocaine, 9 firearms, and 5 vehicles. In fiscal year 2020, the HSI Tegucigalpa TCIU made 99 arrests, and seized 1,078 pounds of cocaine, an aircraft, and 2 firearms.

The close relationships built by HSI's TCIU program have led to unique opportunities to share information with law enforcement counterparts in the Northern Triangle in support of international efforts to combat TCOs in the region. In March 2021, HSI reinitiated the Operation CENTAM/Northern Triangle Initiative, deploying special agents to HSI attaché offices within the Northern Triangle to assist with targeting MS-13 gang members and other Northern Triangle-based TCOs operating in or connected to the United States. The initiative also focuses on developing and furthering Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force investigations across the United States and in the Northern Triangle countries. The agents coordinate with HSI Attaché office personnel, TCIU members, local law enforcement, and other Federal agencies to augment, assist, and provide expertise to advance investigations into TCOs.

In May 2018, HSI initiated Operation Gatehouse, an initiative that deploys TCIU officers from Northern Triangle countries to the United States to assist HSI domestic field offices with targeting and investigating MS-13 gang members within the United States. As part of their assigned duties, TCIU officers assist HSI with criminal gang investigations and work closely with Federal, State, and local partners to identify, disrupt, and dismantle transnational criminal gangs and organizations. Most recently, in May 2021, HSI deployed TCIU personnel from El Salvador and Honduras to HSI domestic field offices in furtherance of Gatehouse.

Recognizing the regional nature of TCOs within South and Central America, HSI launched Operation Citadel to identify, disrupt, and dismantle TCOs and terrorist support networks by targeting the mechanisms used to move migrants, illicit funds, and contraband throughout the region. Citadel provides resources to enhance foreign partners' investigative, intelligence, and information-sharing capabilities to counter transnational threats and organized crime. In turn, this assistance provides HSI the ability to expand domestic and international investigations well beyond U.S. borders and to more effectively target the illicit pathways exploited by TCOs. Citadel facilitates training and capacity-building through cross-border operations with partner nation TCIUs, undercover operations, judicially approved wire intercepts, and document and media exploitation at ports of entry and along smuggling routes.

Investigative activities also include sensitive site exploitation/evidence collection and biometric collection of extraterritorial criminal travel (ECT) subjects of special interest. HSI's ECT program is a partnership between HSI and the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) Criminal Division, Human Rights, and Special Prosecutions Section. The program uses expert dedicated investigative, prosecutorial, and intelligence resources to target and aggressively pursue, disrupt, and dismantle foreign-based transnational human smuggling networks. ECT supports the highest-priority human smuggling investigations posing the greatest National security and public safety threats. These include investigations concerning special interest non-citizens and investigations that pose a significant humanitarian concern, to include maritime smuggling events, extortion, kidnapping, and corruption, among others.

Pushing our borders out to effectively identify and mitigate threats before they reach the United States remains a priority for DHS, HSI, and our counterparts. A key tool in this fight is the Biometric Identification Transnational Migration Alert Program (BITMAP). Pursuant to BITMAP, HSI trains and equips TCIUs and other cooperating foreign law enforcement officers to collect and share biometric and biographic data on suspects of particular interest, such as third-country nationals who are encountered by foreign law enforcement agencies at or along irregular border-crossing check points, illicit pathways, airports, seaports, jails, detention centers, and specialized mobile units. Foreign law enforcement partners share their collected BITMAP information with HSI, and this biometric data is used to populate U.S. databases and subsequently identify transnational criminals; known or suspected terrorists; gang members; and other persons of interest and prevent their travel to the United States. BITMAP information is also used to provide host-nation law enforcement partners with actionable intelligence related to terrorist, criminal, and National security threats.

The National Air Trafficking Initiative (NATI) is an HSI-led initiative to address the transportation of narcotics from source countries to the United States by air, which is the preferred method of smuggling by many Colombian and Mexican drug cartels. HSI has partnered with CBP Air and Marine Operations, and other Federal agencies to HSI's efforts to disrupt these smuggling routes by shutting down the transshipment of cocaine through Guatemala and Belize. These efforts have resulted in a decrease of air deliveries of narcotics. This investigation has resulted in historic interdictions, arrests, and seizures that have assisted several domestic HSI offices with their transnational narcotics smuggling investigations. To date, NATI has resulted in 63 arrests and the seizure of 59 aircraft valued at over \$23 million, \$15 million in U.S. currency, over 33,000 kilograms of cocaine, and 27 firearms, striking a serious blow to TCOs exploiting our Nation's borders and furthering the efforts to disrupt and dismantle TCOs.

#### *Domestic Operations*

To complement its international focus, HSI's efforts continue at the border and within our domestic field offices, where HSI special agents respond to and investigate criminal schemes that are encountered or identified in the United States. Along the border, many investigations begin as reactive cases in response to seizures of drugs, money, guns, or other contraband, or to interdictions or apprehensions of undocumented noncitizens. Leads are also developed through a variety of other methods, including referrals from Federal, State, and local law enforcement partners; confidential informants and sources of information; tip line or social media reporting; community relations and public affairs outreach; criminal analysis/targeting; and information gleaned from existing operations.

Upon receiving information into a potential crime, HSI uses the full breadth of its authorities and expertise to pursue the investigation and attack all aspects of the organizations responsible. HSI special agents work diligently to expand their cases to complex, multi-jurisdictional investigations targeting key individuals, communications, logistics networks, and vulnerabilities within a TCO's command structure. To do this, HSI special agents use sophisticated investigative tools and techniques to collect evidence and conduct operations designed to disrupt and dismantle TCO operations and mitigate the threat they pose to the homeland. These actions occur at home and abroad, involve key U.S. and foreign law enforcement partnerships, and require significant, long-term manpower and resource commitments.

While HSI conducts these activities in furtherance of the full spectrum of crimes that HSI investigates, the crimes that TCOs in the Northern Triangle most often pursue are the smuggling of narcotics and undocumented noncitizens into the United States; the smuggling of weapons and currency out of the United States; and the illegal operations of transnational gangs.

To combat narcotics smuggling, HSI special agents launch complex criminal investigations designed to expose and take down sophisticated networks that produce, transport, broker, finance, sell, and distribute illegal drugs. These efforts have resulted in some of the most significant arrests of traffickers and seizures of illicit drugs across the globe. HSI also continues to expand its Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST) footprint across the United States and uses this model to ensure a comprehensive interagency response to the continuous border security, public safety, and National security threat posed by drug trafficking organizations. HSI-led BEST teams—comprising officers from HSI's Federal, State, and local partners—eliminate barriers and leverage the authorities and resources of HSI's partners in the fight to identify, investigate, disrupt, and dismantle TCOs at every level of operation.

To mitigate the human smuggling threat, HSI focuses its investigative efforts on smuggling networks that pose a National security and public safety risk, jeopardize lives, or engage in violence, abuse, hostage-taking, or extortion. In coordination with domestic and international partners, HSI targets and investigates all links in the human-smuggling chain, including overseas recruiters and organizers, fraudulent document vendors and facilitators, corrupt officials, financial facilitators, and transportation and employment infrastructures that facilitate and benefit from human smuggling. As a result, HSI and its partners have disrupted the efforts of several organizations attempting to smuggle humans into the United States from special interest countries, identified and dismantled pipelines used to smuggle undocumented noncitizens through Central and South America, seized millions of dollars from entities actively violating U.S. immigration and money-laundering statutes, and dismantled networks of transportation and harboring cells that endanger undocumented noncitizens by exposure, abandonment, or unsafe transportation methods.

TCOs, including narcotics and human smuggling organizations, generate significant proceeds from their crimes, often in cash. To keep their proceeds and associated activities away from the scrutiny of financial regulators and law enforcement agencies, criminal actors avoid traditional financial institutions by repatriating their illicit proceeds across our borders through conveyances such as commercial and private aircraft, passenger and commercial vehicles, maritime vessels, and pedestrian crossings at our land borders. HSI diligently pursues these violations in an effort to disrupt TCO operations by identifying and seizing currency and assets attained through their criminal activities.

TCOs also require a steady supply of firearms and ammunition to assert control over the territory where they operate, eliminate rival criminal organizations, and resist Government operations. In response, HSI focuses its weapons smuggling investigations on disrupting the illicit flow of firearms, firearms components, and ammunition from the United States to other countries. HSI special agents investigate individuals and criminal organizations that are responsible for the financing, procurement, brokering, transportation, and dissemination of firearms in support of TCOs. These efforts take weapons off the streets of our communities and prevent the smuggling of U.S. arms to other countries where they can be used to commit acts of violence.

TCOs such as MS-13 represent a significant threat to public safety in communities throughout the United States. Gangs commit violent crimes and facilitate criminal activity such as narcotics and firearms trafficking, sex trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, and corruption. To combat this threat, HSI conducts multi-jurisdictional and international investigations that target gang leadership, members, and associates in the United States and abroad. HSI works closely with the Department of Justice to prosecute gang members and enterprises, often pursuing Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) Act, Violent Crimes in Aid of Racketeering (VICAR), and criminal conspiracy charges to disrupt and dismantle gang operations and organizations.

From narcotics smuggling to bulk cash smuggling to transnational gang violations, the investigations HSI conducts out of its domestic field offices represent an important part of the U.S. Government's efforts to disrupt and dismantle TCOs linked to the Northern Triangle.

#### JOINT TASK FORCE ALPHA

DHS and DOJ continue to identify strategies to counter the TCOs facilitating and profiting from the increased influx of migrants originating from Central America and Mexico and transiting to the United States. Joint Task Force Alpha (JTFA) is one facet of the U.S. Government's response to this problem.

Initiated by DOJ and launched in partnership with DHS, JTFA is a multiagency operation designed to identify, target, investigate, and prosecute known TCOs engaged in human smuggling from Mexico and/or through the Northern Triangle countries to the United States via the Southwest Border. HSI is a primary partner of DOJ in this initiative. The aim of JTFA is to proactively investigate and prosecute those who are smuggling and trafficking individuals into the United States, with a particular focus on individuals and networks who abuse, exploit, or endanger those being smuggled; pose National security threats; or have links to transnational organized crime. In addition to investigations and prosecutions in the United States, JTFA seeks to work closely with foreign partners to ensure a coordinated, international response to illicit cross-border human smuggling.

Drawing upon a wide range of resources across the Government, JTFA leverages and synchronizes the intelligence, interdiction, investigative, and prosecutorial capabilities of HSI, CBP, and other partners to maximize efforts to counter transnational

human smuggling networks that operate from and through Central America and Mexico to the United States. By unifying efforts and capitalizing upon the authorities, knowledge, and specialized skillsets and capabilities of each partner agency, the JTFA is better positioned to more effectively counter, mitigate, disrupt and ultimately dismantle the most significant human smuggling TCOs operating along and facilitating movement to the Southwest Border.

Enhancing effective prosecution of HSI human smuggling investigations is a key component of JTFA's mission. Through fiscal year 2020 and thus far in fiscal year 2021, HSI has initiated more than 3,800 new human smuggling investigations, 69 of which have been designated as significant priority cases for HSI. DOJ has evaluated and identified a subset of these cases for inclusion in the initial JTFA efforts and will be the foundation of DOJ's prosecutorial focus.

As the primary law enforcement entities involved in JTFA, HSI, and CBP field components review existing JTFA priority investigations and threats. Additionally, HSI and CBP jointly develop targeting, interdiction, investigative, and prosecutorial strategies for each new JTFA investigation. Field components lean on their respective local research and analytical components as much as possible to maximize information sharing and coordination of investigative and enforcement efforts.

HSI plays a critical role in the implementation of this initiative alongside its U.S. and international partners. HSI coordinates interdictions, investigations, and enforcement actions domestically and internationally; conducts intelligence analysis and document and media exploitation; facilitates deconfliction through established interagency centers; and supports prosecution and training. HSI has committed to doing this through assigning dedicated special agents and intelligence analysts to the JTFA at the headquarters level, within multiple domestic field offices, and within attaché offices in Central America and Mexico; by capitalizing on its strong foreign law enforcement partnerships; by leveraging existing international programs such as its TCIUs, BITMAP, and Operation Citadel; and by using its expert human and technological analysis capabilities. The integration of HSI's operations with the activities of DOJ, CBP, and other partner agencies participating in JTFA facilitates increased cooperation and unity-of-effort across all levels of Government, domestically and abroad, in the fight to counter TCOs engaged in human smuggling, transnational gang activity, and other forms of cross-border crime that jeopardize the safety and security of the homeland.

#### CONCLUSION

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your continued support of HSI and the critical investigative role it plays in investigating the TCOs that facilitate and profit from cross-border crimes. HSI remains committed to its mission to secure the homeland from transnational crime and threats and to uphold the National security and public safety of the United States.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Mr. Condon. I thank our witnesses for their testimony. I will remind the subcommittee that we each will have 5 minutes to question the panel. I will now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questions.

First, a question for both of you. The nature of these multi-international TCOs has made it difficult to prosecute these networks, but really it is crucial that those who violate U.S. laws are brought to justice. It is even more important that these individuals know that we are watching and there will be a price to be paid should they violate our laws. What kind of jurisdictional authority do each of your components have to investigate and prosecute these TCOs that operate outside the United States? Mr. Russo.

Mr. RUSSO. Mr. Chairman, we couldn't agree with you any more. You know, that is where Operation Sentinel is a clear focus because our efforts include the ability to work with our foreign partners to freeze bank accounts. That is, you know, getting right into their pockets making sure—

Chairman CORREA. So, Mr. Russo, let me interrupt you. Do we have the cooperation of our foreign partners—

Mr. RUSSO. We do, sir.

Chairman CORREA [continuing]. To do so?

Mr. RUSSO. We do, sir.

Chairman CORREA. Mexico?

Mr. RUSSO. Absolutely.

Chairman CORREA. El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras?

Mr. RUSSO. Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. We are there. We just recently deployed staff, including intelligence analysts and officers and agents to Guatemala. Our first deployment was in June where we sent 16 employees down there to work with the government of Guatemala to open up checkpoints, to conduct inspections. We have conducted even in just the first month while we have been down there, over 7,000 inspections of individuals. We have identified 50 individuals that are engaging in human smuggling. So, the efforts are there.

Chairman CORREA. So, you have identified them. What next?

Mr. RUSSO. What is next is to turn them over—we have turned them over to the government of Guatemala for prosecution.

Chairman CORREA. What about turning them over to the U.S. Government for prosecution?

Mr. RUSSO. Well, I would imagine that those efforts, you know, would have to continue in the future. But we are not there yet.

Chairman CORREA. The reason I say that, Mr. Russo, is that I am of the belief that a foreign national who commits crimes is more concerned about ending up in a U.S. jail than they would in a jail in other parts of the world. I think it is a bigger deterrent if you put them in our jails as it is in a foreign jail.

Mr. RUSSO. We agree, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CORREA. Mr. Condon, any thoughts?

Mr. CONDON. Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman. I think for the HSI perspective, we do get very good cooperation from our partners. In fact, we do that primarily through our TCIU initiative where we have vetted teams of law enforcement officials that we work very cohesively with. Just yesterday, our team in El Salvador arrested—or excuse me—in Honduras, arrested 32 Honduran nationals for human smuggling violations.

Chairman CORREA. Thirty-two hundred?

Mr. CONDON. Thirty-two.

Chairman CORREA. Thirty-two.

Mr. CONDON. Thirty-two. That was the equivalent—and with that operation what they are able to do with our TCIU is share that information rapidly. When we do that, we can employ things like our biometrics BITMAP program to share those biometrics with CBP immediately and other partners to ensure that these folks are fully identified. We also exploit there any kind of data rapidly through our TCIUs there in close partnership with our task force officers. We are able then to build our investigations further from that standpoint. Without these individuals being in the United States, we can start and push that threat further out and then start our investigation.

Chairman CORREA. Gentlemen, you mentioned a number in terms of arrests. I think both of you said less than 100. So, my question would be, is this enough to make a dent or is this a drop in the bucket?

Mr. RUSSO. Well, Mr. Chairman, the operation that we alluded to is Operation Sentinel and it just started in May. So, you know,



we believe that that operation as it unfolds and as the phases of that operation continue we will have some major successes.

Chairman CORREA. Mr. Condon.

Mr. CONDON. Yes, sir. Similarly, through the Joint Task Force Alpha, through work with our partners such as CBP and Department of Justice, we have identified at least 20 cases or investigations to put under that umbrella for the large-scale significant investigations that are being coordinated and ideally, will be prosecuted here in the United States for the most impact. That is being done through Joint Task Force Alpha.

Chairman CORREA. I am out of time, but hopefully with a incentive, my Members here will do another set of round of questions. But my next question later on I will ask is, you have got Operation Alpha and Sentinel. Clearly, we have had other operations before. How are you coordinating or how is the legacy of prior successes or lessons learned being incorporated into Alpha and Sentinel? How are we essentially working across what I would call silos?

Homeland Security is big. It was created 20 years ago to coordinate across Government agencies. My concern is we are still operating under silos and that we haven't quite gotten there. So, in the next round I am going to ask for you to address those questions. If I can, I will turn to our Ranking Member, Mr. Meijer, for his 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I agree wholeheartedly on seeking more strong criminal deterrents. Just briefly on that question of silos. I think we saw with the—when the DEA started to have that ability to engage in bringing back some of the narco traffickers in the late 1980's and 1990's to the United States a strong deterrent capability came in there. Clearly, this is a human trafficking component is a multi-billion—potentially a multi-billion dollar industry for a lot of these same organizations that just, you know, when we think about the scourge of drugs versus human smuggling and what that does to the border, I think we have been approaching that through two different lenses.

But shifting to my question directed specifically to Mr. Condon. Sir, if you could provide just an overview briefly of HSI's TCIU, the Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit, just what it does, some of the challenges that are facing it today in carrying out its mission.

Mr. CONDON. Thank you, sir. So, the TCIU program is HSI's partnership with our host nation partners where we bring along law enforcement officials or Immigration and Customs officials from each of these countries, especially the Northern Triangle. We vet them. We utilize polygraphs. We have a very intense training program that we bring them to to the United States in Georgia where we present the training. We also incorporate their prosecutors as part of this or identify prosecutors to go through the similar sort of training and capacity building.

Through that, we also have them—we work with the State department in their host nation to have them in a separate sort of facility, oftentimes, away from their typical police headquarters. They focus largely speaking on these crimes. Basically, we build their capacity. We help them to be able to investigate and interdict and prosecute these types of crimes in their home countries. But

also, just as importantly, to share information with us appropriately to pass information and leads back and support our domestic cases is part of the goal to prosecute and dismantle these organizations largely here in the United States.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you. So, focusing on that training, having some segregation of office locations so that it is kind-of clear there is a separate mission for them within their host nation country. But so I am clear, you are not authorized to pay them directly.

Mr. CONDON. No, sir. Also, the only thing we—DOJ entities are allowed to pay salary stipends, however, DHS does lack that. So, there are times where we do lose our officers because these officers are obviously very—the pay for these officers by their home countries is very, very low. So, oftentimes, other USG agencies are able to provide some salary stipends. So, one of the things that does hamper us slightly there is the—or not slightly, but does hamper us is the inability to kind-of mirror that.

Mr. MEIJER. Then, obviously, and I think it is smart to have that segregation of that office, but still I could only imagine that transnational criminal organizations in a Northern Triangle country are able to exert tremendous influence potentially within the government by, obviously, offering financial remuneration otherwise. So, is that a concern on that oversight of that potential for some of the individuals you are partnering with to, obviously, be under a kind-of clear threat, but also, get—

Mr. CONDON. Yes,——

Mr. MEIJER [continuing]. Taken off the mission?

Mr. CONDON [continuing]. Very much so. Yes, very much so. We try to in addition to the financial inducements, you know, up their professional standards, you know, the mission focus and, you know, so much what we, you know, as best we can here in the United States, but definitely the financial inducements it is a clear challenge.

Mr. MEIJER. Then just shifting real quick. Last week, actually in this same hearing room, we had an Intelligence and Counterterrorism Subcommittee hearing about the use of cryptocurrency by TCOs in Central America, but also otherwise. Are you seeing any—this could go to either of you—are you seeing any challenges in terms of, you know, you mentioned Operation Sentinel to debar businesses from Federal contracts, to work with those insurance agencies, any challenges of transnational criminal organizations that you have been seeing doing an end-run around some of our financial, you know, money laundering or in other operations on the financial side by using cryptocurrency as an end-run?

Mr. CONDON. For the Northern Triangle, and we just confirmed with our offices there, we have not seen that to any great lengths in the Northern Triangle. We are seeing that further down range, if you will, in Colombia and other areas. But, yes, in the Northern Triangle, no. However, we are taking steps to get ahead of that. We are incorporating training for our TCIUs. We are also—we have also funded a very small—it is in the nascent stages of small sort-of cyber centers. One in Panama, one in Guatemala to help sort-of build capacity there in the cyber realm for these TCIUs and our host nation partners to try to at least get somewhat ahead of this

curve when it does hit. It is only matter of time. Right now, not so prevalent in Latin America—excuse me—Central America.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you. You know, again, you know, strong partners here and looking to shore up any ways we can of finding ways in which our current approach is not as strong. So, potentially it could be. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you very much, Mr. Meijer. Now, I call Ms. Titus for 5 minutes of questions. Ma'am?

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to our witnesses. I will just start with a question to Mr. Russo. You know that TCOs are diversifying their revenue sources. You know it better than anybody. One of the things they are doing is turning to resource extraction and wildlife trafficking. These illegal actions not only harm our wildlife species and our environment, but they have also led to an increase in violence as environmental conservationists who attempt to stop poachers have been attacked and killed in some instances.

The last Congress I had a bill that passed. It was called the Rescuing Animals with Rewards Act. It made wildlife trafficking part of the State Department's whistleblower program. It goes a long way toward combating trafficking. I am glad that we have it. But we need to stop this method of illicit funding and financing when criminals try to bring these animals across our borders. I just wonder what you are doing to disrupt this kind of supply chain, as it were, and how you can try to help protect our wildlife and also our environment and the people who are engaged in protecting those two things themselves?

Mr. RUSSO. Thank you, Congresswoman. We work very well with Fish and Wildlife at the ports of entry to really look at that specific threat. When we encounter any of these animals that come across, we are quick to turn to Fish and Wildlife to investigate all of these threats and working with HSI as well. The threats, as you say, they come far and wide and they all lead back to these transnational organized crime syndicates. Our job is really to take each single one of these cases and work it from cradle to grave. So, that is what we are doing.

Ms. TITUS. Well, thank you. I appreciate hearing that. I would ask to both of you, you know, so often the people who migrate here come up through Central America and Mexico are really victims of the lawless and violent activities of these organizations. I know you work with community-based organizations that have some direct experience dealing with these victims. But I wonder if you engage at all with migrants themselves, especially women to find out how you can better understand their experiences and how you can collaborate with local NGO's or civic organizations to try to deal with the problem and help these victims maybe even before they get on the road.

Mr. RUSSO. So, Congresswoman, we obviously encounter and engage with all of these poor migrants coming across and we understand the struggles that they face. We do interview them and we talk to them at length to understand what it is that they are dealing with, but also to understand how it is that these TCOs are operating. We think that by engaging with them and talking to them more and more we can help them more and help dismantle these

TCOs. The migrants are taken care of by us. We have medical contractors that we have employed throughout the facilities on the Southwest Border, including trauma care for them as well. So, that is part of our efforts going forward.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. Mr. Condon, you want to add to that?

Mr. CONDON. Similar to what Mr. Russo said. Obviously, Mr. Russo encounters more of these folks in the border and what we do is—if we were similarly to find—encounter these folks in the interior, we would follow the same in post-arrest interviews and ensure that their care and safety was adequately taken care of and work with our local State health officials and police officials to ensure, you know, all their needs were met should they be victims of violence or coercion and, you know, forced labor and things like that nature.

Ms. TITUS. I would think that would be important for human trafficking as well. It is kind-of like neighborhood policing if you feel comfortable talking to law enforcement, you are much more likely to give them some information that could be helpful to keep the whole neighborhood safe. I would think that these migrants if they feel like they can trust you, they would be able to give you some pretty good information you could use to help address the problem.

Mr. RUSSO. That is correct, Congresswoman. You know, when these individuals, you know, understand that they have been taken advantage of, they are happy to talk to us.

Ms. TITUS. Right.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Ms. Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you. Thank you very much. I call on Mr. Bishop for 5 minutes of questions, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, you have a way of putting things sometimes. I have noticed that a number of occasions. You asked a question a moment ago of the witnesses about whether the efforts to interdict or counter the cartels are a drop in the bucket. Mr. Russo, I was struck. I hadn't had a chance to read your statement beforehand. I was struck by what you said about the cartel—I have always wondered and I have heard about the cartels earning tremendous revenues from the flow of migrants across the border. So, I looked at your—I pulled the statement and I just want to—it bears emphasis. So, what is in your statement is, it is estimated that cartels profit anywhere between \$200 million and \$2.3 billion alone for smuggling migrants from the Northern Triangle to the Southwestern Border. You cited a Rand Corporation source, I believe, from 2019. I don't know whether this—this is quite a big range. I would assume that that revenue is in proportion to the flow, right? So, the more people that come, the more the cartels earn, right?

Mr. RUSSO. Congressman, that would make sense. But there are a lot of factors that go into those numbers. That is—

Mr. BISHOP. I am sure.

Mr. RUSSO. That is why the range is so wide.

Mr. BISHOP. Yes.

Mr. RUSSO. It really depends.

Mr. BISHOP. I was just asking really for that point. I mean, it is a point of obvious agreement. I think it does make a tremendous amount of sense. You have men and women who are undertaking risks to their lives and working hard to interdict and counter these cartels. Homeland Security Investigations has people who are taking risks to their lives and you made reference to other people who might cooperate with you being at risk. The American taxpayers carry a tremendous amount of expense for those efforts. But to the point about whether it is a drop in the bucket, if the flow is large enough, those efforts kind of get washed out, don't they? Mr. Russo.

Mr. RUSSO. I wouldn't necessarily agree, Congressman. To us, every single one of these cases can help us dismantle a network. As we work these cases and especially now as we are working to look at the logistics and the finances behind these groups, every single encounter that we make is an encounter that can help us bring down these networks. So, you know, obviously it can seem like a drop in the bucket right now, but as we continue to work together and as we continue to look at the networks behind these smuggling and TCOs, I think we are going to make—we are going to make quite a difference.

Mr. BISHOP. Well, I appreciate your spirit and the can-do attitude that you bring to it. But I ask you, sir, and I don't say this because I want to demoralize the efforts that you and your men and women bring to this task, either of you in your departments, but I think it bears emphasis. Because policy makers up here need to hear if policy is being set in Washington to facilitate huge flows, unprecedented in the last 21 years, flows across the border, does that not demoralize the men and women that pursue your responsibilities? Mr. Russo.

Mr. RUSSO. I think the men and women of CBP, and I am sure I speak for HSI and ICE as well, we are dedicated to doing our job. You know, it doesn't matter the volume of the threat for us. It is about doing our job and doing it to the best of our ability.

Mr. BISHOP. So, if the coyotes are across the Rio Grande as they are paid \$6,000 a pop for migrants coming across and they are ridiculing and cursing and jeering the CBP borders on our side, you don't think that has an impact on their morale?

Mr. RUSSO. It could have an impact, Congressman. But, you know, our job remains the same. Our job is to protect the borders and to protect this country.

Mr. BISHOP. Well, I admire you. I particularly admire those line officers and the investigators that you have, sir, Mr. Condon, for the way they persist in the face of misguided policy. I wonder if you have—and so I have got about maybe a chance to ask one more question. I have so many to ask. But I understood along the way that it was anticipated the Biden administration has been saying that this massive surge we are seeing across the border was going to peter out. It was seasonal. It happens every spring and it was going to stop, hasn't stopped. Mr. Condon or Mr. Russo, do you have any insight as to why that prediction has turned out not to be correct?

Mr. CONDON. I will defer to Mr. Russo on the migrant influence for the specific numbers being encountered.

Mr. RUSSO. The numbers have not gone down. I mean, I am sure you have seen the numbers, Congressman. You know, we encountered 188,000 individuals in June. Migration flows, you know, what we have seen over the last 40, 50 years, they really do ebb and flow. So, you know, with COVID, with natural disasters, those are all push factors that lead to some of these migration issues.

Mr. BISHOP. God bless the law enforcement folks that work for the United States of America on behalf and through—under your charge. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. RUSSO. Thank you, Congressman.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you very much, Mr. Bishop. Before I move to our next, Mrs. Harshbarger. I just want to say that you bring up some good issues, which is a drop in the bucket, migration flows, patterns, and deterrents. I am hoping we can have a few more hearings on these issues because one of the things that I have heard over and over again, big push factor is the economy. I mean, over the last few years, Chinese imports of textiles have devastated not only the Carolinas in our country, but they have decimated the economies in Central America. Now with COVID-19, you have these push factors that continue to push folks.

Mr. Bishop, I will tell you, I went to El Paso, but I also went to Tijuana. In El Paso, you have a situation of the migrant children. In Tijuana, you have under Section 42 of the Health Code, deportations of families. I went in to interview a lot of those families there in the Tijuana or the Mexican side of the border. It was interesting because they weren't talking 6,000, they were talking 10,000 per family per smuggling attempt. A lot of those families—

Mr. BISHOP. Inflation, Mr. Chairman. It is inflation.

Chairman CORREA. Good God, that is hyperinflation, sir. Their comment was, I sold everything I had back home to make the trip. What they were doing on the Mexican side of the border with help of NGO's, I would say, trying to figure out how to get back home and try to figure out what they were going to go back to do. Because they had bet everything and had lost.

So, a lot of these issues are important because as we talk about U.S. aid to Central America, what it is going to, what it is supposed to do, versus the dynamics. Some people would say the border. I would say the dynamics of the American continent as they continue to unfold. We have got to anticipate what is going on.

Right now, it is shocking to see how much money is being made off of smuggling. It almost seems like it is competing with illegal drugs in terms of profit centers. So, to anticipate where do they go next? What is the next profit center? Where is this money being invested? How do we create a deterrent? It is very interesting issues for policy makers. Policies that have to be made based on the facts that you are presenting to us don't want to operate up here, pontificate based on philosophy or perspective, but rather let the facts drive the solution.

That is what I would like to do is continue to work with you and try to figure out this whole thing that, you know, I will be honest with all of us. If we are honest, we only look at south of the border when we see smoke. We only act when we see fire. This thing has been going on for 50 years. As long as we don't see it, as long as it stays invisible, you know what, it is not there. Now it is there.

We have got to focus on this for the next couple of decades to figure it out. It is not going to be one easy solution, but a number of solutions designed to implement a public policy designed to stabilize. I say that stabilize this continent that right now isn't looking good from a—you know, Mexico just had the great elections. Great elections. Hundred political candidates were assassinated. Where did you hear that? Did you read that anywhere? We have got challenges. I am hoping, you know, my quick commercial here is we have got a lot of work to do in this committee and I am hoping to work with our witnesses. So, thank you very much for bringing up those comments.

Now, I will turn to Mrs. Harshbarger, for her 5 minutes of comments. Thank you.

Ms. HARSHBARGER. Thank you, Chairman Correa, and thank you to the witnesses today. We all know this is a huge problem and, you know, I guess one of the concerns that I have is that in a lot of rural areas, especially in Guatemala, there has been chaos because of the pandemic, but it strengthened the narco trafficking in those areas. As a pharmacist, you know, we see that drugs are coming in unimpeded and the process going way down. So, when you talk to these law enforcement agents, they are just—it is unbelievably hard to counter some of the things that are happening. But if you live in Guatemala, for God sakes, even the local governments and the people there, you know, sometimes they become beholden to these people because they have no other choice. You know, that just tears the society apart. No wonder they want to migrate to this country.

Now, I have learned that these Guatemalan authorities are allowing some of these people that live there the property rights to be violated by taking their land, some of these narco traffickers. I just wondered what do you think we can do about that? How can we stabilize that government to keep them from wanting to come over and, you know, it is a bad situation. It is not those people's faults, but we have to step in and say, if we help you, what is it we can do to make things more efficient and to make that government responsible and accountable for what they do?

Mr. RUSSO. Congresswoman, we agree with you. From a CBP perspective, the deployment of our agents and officers and intel analysts to Guatemala is a step in the right direction. It is our ability to mentor, train the Guatemalan government officials. We work with their mobile targeting interdiction unit to help them understand about anti-corruption so that they can better, you know, conduct operations in Guatemala. So, that is what we are trying to do while we are there.

Ms. HARSHBARGER. Yes. You know, we were at the border with the Ranking Member down—well, it was in April. HSI said, all we want to do is we want to be able to—we don't need more laws, we just want to be able to use the ones we have on the books already. I guess my question is, what is it that—how are their hands being tied to where they can't combat what is going over? We found out some of the modalities they use to get these people to come in and shuffle these drugs through social media, with TikTok, and some of these other things. I mean, it is a travesty that we are not doing something about that. But on your end, what do you see that you

are not able to do that you should be doing and you should have the authority to do, sirs?

Mr. CONDON. From the HSI perspective, social media and maybe misinformation on social media is a challenge. It is something that I think many agencies are dealing with and we are kind-of coping with that and developing strategies. But also similar to what Mr. Russo is doing, we work hand-in-hand with CBP and Central America to eliminate or mitigate much of that corrupt focus and to work with our vetted teams to try to, again, build that professionalization in order to, again, to keep those threats from coming to the United States. The more and more we do that, the less strain you are going to have on the U.S. law enforcement and its related organizations. That is the main focus for us. But the challenge for the social media and those types of things is a small drop in the bucket, but we are beginning to help train our TCIUs and others on how to combat that social misinformation, how to work more closely in the cyber realm. But it is, again, in the nascent stages. So, that would be—that is kind-of the main drivers at least on the international side to try to push and to try to work and mitigate that further down range before it gets here to the United States.

Ms. HARSHBARGER. Well, you know, in my opinion and many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, you know, these cartels are the biggest criminal threat to our Nation, period. We have to do more to subdue them and, you know, closing the border would be a perfect example. Making sure that when we do deliver aid, money, whatever it is to these triangle countries, that we hold them accountable and we have some kind of outcome system set in place so we know that when we give that in good faith that they are going to fight and help those people and make them want to stay there. That is the bottom line.

Thank you so much, gentlemen. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you, Mrs. Harshbarger. Now, without objection, I would like to go on to a second set of questions, if I can. Gentlemen, I am going to follow up where I left off, which was you are doing the job of finding a needle in a haystack. You have got some great organizations, a lot of work, Project Alpha, Project Sentinel. You have incorporated probably a lot of the work you have done in the past through other agencies. Do you feel you are doing enough to coordinate the resources of Department of Homeland Security so that you can be successful?

Mr. RUSSO. Mr. Chairman, you spoke of silos and I have been in this agency for the better part of 25 years, and I can tell you that we have come a long way. I speak for ICE as well when I say this because we work hand-in-hand. We have over 260 employees who are assigned to task force offices across the Nation. They work with the HIDTAs, the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas. They work with HSI, with the DEA, with the FBI, and all the State and local partners. Those relationships have never been stronger than they are today.

We are breaking down those silos. Really, when you look at Operation Sentinel, it is a perfect example of that because we are not doing this alone. We are working with all of our partners to build



these cases and I just think that we are in a much better place today than we ever were.

Chairman CORREA. Mr. Condon.

Mr. CONDON. Similarly, I would agree with Mr. Russo as well. We, again, cradle to grave—cradle, the beginning to the end, just about everything we do is in conjunction with CBP. In this day and age of data analytics, it just makes sense and there is no reason not to.

Further, one of the best tools we bring is our border enforcement security task forces. That is recognizing that, you know, these border issues they go into the interior, they affect a lot of communities and there is a lot of shared interest. There is the violence that is spawned from some of these things. The smuggling events that create disruptions. Opioids that come in through, you know, Asia or through China or through Mexico at the express consignment hubs. We have initiated border and security task forces in Memphis, northern Kentucky in Louisville to try to combat that and bring our State and local partners, even into that realm of the opioid issues and try to show them and help break down those barriers when they have intelligence, to share that directly on the impact of where these illicit things are coming into. Further, the border enforcement security task forces, there are 80 of them around the country, including seaports and airports and try to bring that similar subset in so you have everybody in the room. That includes State, local, Tribal—

Chairman CORREA. Mr. Condon, let me interrupt you. I only got a couple of minutes here. Fusion centers, we have one in Orange County. I work very closely with my local sheriff. He is always complaining to us that, you know, he is kind-of the stepchild when it comes to resources. When it comes to coordinating, he complains that the Fed, Federal agencies, it is a one-way street when it comes to sharing information.

I say that to you because I think of the border as one piece of a bigger puzzle. We cannot overlook the fact that for smuggling, for drugs, for these other elements to be successful, there has to be a connection in the United States. That means good intel from people working in the community, good intel from folks that are seeing who the drug dealer is. Good intel from seeing where things begin to unfold in the United States side. Would you say that we are working enough with these local folks, fusion centers? Fusion centers, as you know, are where the sheriff, the police officer, the FBI agent, some of the others, get together, you know, 30 people to try to figure this out at the street level. It is a question for both of you.

Mr. CONDON. I would say, while always there is work to be done, I would say it is better than ever. I know HSI puts a premium on being responsive to State and local officials. It is really not tolerated. It is not part of our ethos to be—to not work with them and not respond out to their calls and not to share, more importantly, because that is the only way this works when you share that information. It is not just to get Federal prosecutions, right? Oftentimes, it is best to get a State prosecution. Oftentimes, there is the crime, the localized violence that really is impactful to human beings, right, that the State and local officials are very well-equipped to handle. The smaller scale has more impact. So, we

definitely put a premium on that. We want to make sure that that doesn't happen so we do focus on that greatly.

Chairman CORREA. Mr. Russo.

Mr. RUSSO. Mr. Chairman, when it comes to these cases, we are prosecution-agnostic. All we care about is stopping the threat. We will work with anyone. We do work with everyone. We have countless cases of helping State and locals. I can speak to New York because, you know, that is where I most recently worked. The work we did to dismantle MS-13 gangs in New York is just one example of how we work with them.

Chairman CORREA. Thank you very much. I am out of time so, I will turn to our Ranking Member Mr. Meijer, for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. MEIJER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this second round. You know, I was with Mrs. Harshbarger and our Ranking Member down at the border in April. You know, it was—it was enlightening to kind-of to see the reality and that consequence, but also understanding that that flow of individuals is not just—well, it is largely a product on the demand side of those push and pull factors. But on that facilitation side, that there is a very long tail there.

I guess, my first question to Mr. Russo, in the past several months, has there been, you know, I know there are dozens of nationalities represented among those who are seeking to cross the border. We have a very strong, you know, significant majority that are coming from Northern Triangle countries, but also others from Central America, South America, and even farther afield. Have we seen any shifts in those nationalities over the past several months?

Mr. RUSSO. Not really. In looking at the numbers, it is pretty much the same as it has been. When you look at the 188,000 encounters that we had last month, there is also a percentage of individuals that are coming across multiple times. So, there is that percentage as well. But in terms of the diversity of it, it pretty much is the same, the majority being from Mexico.

Mr. MEIJER. Then just from the portion that are not from Latin America originally, I know there are some individuals who seek to cross our border who will fly into airports in the region from Africa or from parts of Asia. Then kind-of seek that land route to circumvent a lot of our passport security checks. I am aware of some of those other activities on that interdiction side. But I guess the broader question, when do those individuals interact with a human trafficking smuggling network? Is that communication something that takes place when they are in Latin America or is there a communication prior, to your awareness? Maybe Mr. Condon.

Mr. RUSSO. It depends. It depends and I will turn to Assistant Director Condon for a greater answer. But I will tell you that even in Guatemala recently, we encountered 12 Uzbekistan nationals in this latest operation that we ran. So, it is happening for sure. But in terms of where they are coming from or where they are encountered, John?

Mr. MEIJER. I guess not just where encountered, but just at what point do you assess that they start to get within the protection or the assistance of a TCO?

Mr. CONDON. So, depending on where and in what part of the region it is encountered, sometimes the human smuggling organizations have to interact with two to three cartels or TCOs, right? Who is control of each, you know, territory, if you will. Oftentimes, it is just to diversify their portfolios. TCOs that wouldn't ordinarily be involved in human smuggling now they have taken that on as sort-of a, you know, to expand their business and diversify, right? So, not to evade the question, per se, but it kind of depends on at what point at each process and how much communication they have had. But it is very connected. A lot of times it is the human smuggling organizations that start and initiate that before moving up to different parts in the region.

Mr. MEIJER. I have exhausted the majority of my questions. But just, Mr. Chairman, I really appreciate this hearing and I appreciate our witnesses. I think it is essential that we don't try to—we don't wait until we shift to the next thing, right? It was drug trafficking, then it became trafficking of individuals. I don't know to what degree, you know, some of our kind-of laws or loosening of regulations in the United States have maybe shifted the demand structure a little bit on their revenue streams. But, you know, those illicit entities, those organizations, the transnational criminal organizations they are making money hand over foot and by the way, those 200 million to 1.2 billion, just to be clear that is profit. Not revenue, but profit.

Chairman CORREA. I can only imagine—

Mr. CONDON. Correct.

Chairman CORREA [continuing]. Where that money came from.

Mr. MEIJER. It is profit. Yes, not revenue, profit. I mean, that, I mean, you take net present value of a company like that, you know, you can list it on NASDAQ.

Chairman CORREA. Mr. Meijer, I can only imagine, I mean, that is a lot of assets to be sold somewhere to generate that kind of—the massive transfer of wealth that is going on from the very poor to the criminal organizations is unbelievable. What is that long-term consequence socially in those Central American countries? Good questions. Thank you very much, sir, and I am going to turn to—

Mr. MEIJER. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman CORREA [continuing]. Mr. Bishop for 5 minutes of questions if you so desire.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have got a couple more. So, and I was thinking about what you just said. I was thinking about Ms. Titus' questions earlier. I guess \$2.3 billion of profits have probably paid to set up some other operations like resource extraction and the wildlife trafficking. It all is, I mean, that is how businesses are built and this is in a weird sort of way, it is a business. I don't want to be its logistics arm, which is what I think we have become.

Let me ask this. I saw an article and I am not sure of what it was quoting from, but it just came out that 50,000 migrants have been released in the United States without a court date. So, at some point in time, there was a change in process since the inauguration this year to not put a court date anymore because they don't show up at court dates. But I guess you get numbers you

can't give but so many out. So, they stopped doing that, but they are required to report—migrants are required to report to their local ICE office within 60 days. I read that 13 percent have so far shown up. So, that is 6,700 have showed up, 16,000 have not and are past the 60-day window to report. That leaves many others, obviously, who are not past the 90 days—or 60 days, but is that—and I don't know who would know more about that. Mr. Condon, perhaps I will address the question to you and you can pass it if you wish. But does that sound accurate and is that a surprise?

Mr. CONDON. Sir, I just—only because I come from the investigations branch—

Mr. BISHOP. Yes.

Mr. CONDON [continuing]. That is not my bailiwick or area of expertise. But I definitely would like the chance to get back with you on that question, if I could.

Mr. BISHOP. Yes, Mr. Russo, do you know the answer?

Mr. RUSSO. Yes, Congressman, I am sorry. We do not have those numbers or I don't have those numbers in front of me.

Mr. BISHOP. Yes.

Mr. RUSSO. I am happy to take that back.

Mr. BISHOP. You said, Mr. Russo, in answering a question a moment ago, that out of the 188,000 encountered in June, some of those came in multiple times. I don't know how to ask the question. If it was somebody visiting a website, they call them unique visitors. But how many unique border crossers then among that 188,000?

Mr. RUSSO. From what I recall, it was about 104,000 of the 188,000.

Mr. BISHOP. OK. Of those 104,000, how many of those 104,000 actually stayed in the United States?

Mr. RUSSO. I don't recall the number but, you know, a large percentage of those were returned under Title 42.

Mr. BISHOP. Mm-hmm. You don't have an estimate for the number that remained?

Mr. RUSSO. I don't have the number, but it is a high—I remember it is a high percent.

Mr. BISHOP. I know you don't have the number. Do you have an estimate of the number?

Mr. RUSSO. I would say about 80, 85 percent.

Mr. BISHOP. Go back so, OK.

Mr. RUSSO. Yes.

Mr. BISHOP. So, 20 percent, 20, 25 percent stay.

Mr. RUSSO. Mm-hmm.

Mr. BISHOP. Twenty, 25,000 people, roughly.

Mr. RUSSO. Correct.

Mr. BISHOP. Once these individuals—how are the people who stay, how are they transported elsewhere within the United States?

Mr. RUSSO. So, we coordinate with HHS and with ICE to determine transportation, so.

Mr. BISHOP. Maybe I will ask Mr. Condon. How are they transported within the United States?

Mr. CONDON. From—

Mr. BISHOP. The folks who remain, 20-, 25,000 last month they remained. Where did they go?

Mr. CONDON. Again, I would have to defer to our co-branch of ERO just to get those facts and figures for you, if I could.

Mr. BISHOP. You do not know?

Mr. CONDON. No.

Mr. BISHOP. You do not know in general?

Mr. CONDON. As far as how they get transported from?

Mr. BISHOP. Yes.

Mr. CONDON. No, I do not as far as that process goes.

Mr. BISHOP. OK. I saw a recent article that a law enforcement source within CBP says that ICE Office of Enforcement and Removal Operations will start issuing cell phones with tracking apps in lieu of using ankle monitoring bracelets for whoever that has been appropriate for to date. Is there any truth to that report, Mr. Condon?

Mr. CONDON. Sir, I am unaware of that. But, again, I will have to get back with you on that one and check with our ERO counterparts on that, if I could, please.

Mr. BISHOP. OK.

Chairman CORREA. Get back to both of us. I am very interested in that information as well.

Mr. BISHOP. Are ICE officers still consistently issuing Notices to Appear?

Mr. CONDON. Similarly, again, I would have to check and get back to you on that with our ERO counterparts for that one. Thank you, sir.

Mr. BISHOP. I think I will stop there, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman CORREA. A lot of work to do. A lot of questions. I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. We will continue to call on you to help us with some of the facts and try to get a better grasp of the challenge ahead of us and how to best come up with the best public policy to effectively address the challenges. I want to thank you for being here today, for your time. I want to remind the Members that if they have any additional questions for the witnesses, to submit them to the witnesses. I ask the witnesses to respond as quickly as possible. The Chair reminds the Members that the committee record will remain open for 10 business days. Without objection, the committee stands adjourned. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 3:05 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]



## APPENDIX

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### QUESTIONS FROM CHAIRMAN J. LUIS CORREA FOR FRANCIS J. RUSSO

*Question 1a.* The multi-national nature of transnational criminal organizations has made it difficult for the United States Government to prosecute those who violate U.S. laws. However, doing so is crucial to preventing future lawlessness.

What role do Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement play in efforts to extradite foreign citizens to the United States for breaking American laws overseas?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 1b.* What authorities are available to your agencies and what impediments do they face?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 2.* Both Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement work with foreign partners in Central America and Mexico to investigate and prosecute transnational criminal organizations operating in those countries; however, issues like systemic government corruption or distrust may undermine these efforts.

Please describe the varying levels of cooperation your agencies receive from Central American nations and Mexico in efforts to codify the principals of the rule of law: ensuring all persons, institutions, and entities are held equally accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, independently adjudicated, and consistent with international human rights principles.

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 3a.* The tactics that transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) utilize are always evolving, and their involvement in the smuggling of migrants across the U.S. border varies based on location and which criminal organization is involved.

Please describe how TCOs are currently enabling migrant trafficking from Central America?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 3b.* What are the typical amounts charged and services provided?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 3c.* How have the models changed and adapted over time?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 3d.* What differences are there across the region, if any?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

### QUESTIONS FROM HON. DAN BISHOP FOR FRANCIS J. RUSSO

*Question 1a.* There was an article saying 50,000 migrants released in the United States without a court date—what policy was changed or altered to allow this?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 1b.* Is it accurate to say 13 percent of released immigrants have showed up to the ICE office as reported, 6,700 showed up, 16,000 haven't and have passed the 60-day window to show up? Do you have an estimate of how many released immigrants?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 2.* Of the 104,000 border crossers that returned multiple times (out of the 188,000 total), how many actually stayed in the United States? What is the number and percentage of how many stayed and how many were returned under Title 42?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 3.* How are the individuals who stay in the United States transported elsewhere within the United States from holding facilities?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 4.* There was an article saying that cell phones will start being issued instead of ankle monitors moving forward—will this be the policy and what is the justification for this?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 5.* Are ICE officers still consistently issuing Notices to Appear?\*

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM HON. DIANA HARSHBARGER FOR FRANCIS J. RUSSO

*Question 1.* I appreciated the witness' responses to my questions regarding TCOs creating chaos and instability along narco-trafficking routes in the Northern Triangle countries. These situations also erode the conditions necessary for legitimate businesses to create economic opportunities necessary to counter migration. Could you please provide further response regarding what more the United States can do—directly or in conjunction with our international partners—to address the problem of Guatemalan authorities failing to uphold property rights against land invasions that occur with increasing frequency—sometimes with the support of narco-traffickers that seek to illegal land on occupied land?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

*Question 2.* Additionally, Mr. Condon noted that ICE is focusing on training and working with vetted partners in host countries to address such threats further down range, before they get to the United States. Could you please provide the committee with greater detail as to the different ways the threats posed by such activity manifest themselves at our border? Could you also identify specifically which TCO's are engaged in activity that poses these threats and the countries in which those TCOs are engaged in this activity?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

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