

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026

HEARINGS BEFORE A SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

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(II)

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2025.

OVERSIGHT OF U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

WITNESS

**TODD LYONS, ACTING DIRECTOR, U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS
ENFORCEMENT (ICE)**

Mr. AMODEI. The Subcommittee on Homeland Security will come to order.

And I am pleased to be joined by the subcommittee's distinguished ranking member, the gentlelady from Illinois, Ms. Underwood.

Welcome, Acting Director Lyons. I thank you for being here.

While we await the details of the full fiscal year 2026 budget request, the focus of this hearing will be upon ICE's operational priorities and the resource requirements to execute such priorities. I want to make sure that your agency has what it needs to do the very important job at hand, and I welcome the discussion today.

I will now turn to my colleague Ms. Underwood for her opening remarks.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you, Chairman Amodei.

And I would like to welcome our witness, Todd Lyons, the Acting Director for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

As the Federal agency charged with the enforcement of violations of customs and immigration laws, the scope of ICE's investigatory and operational work is broad. ICE has an incredibly important role in preserving public safety and national security by combating cartels and other transnational criminal organizations; investigating illicit drug trafficking, including deadly fentanyl, human trafficking, and smuggling networks; and going after violations of trade and intellectual property laws that seek to undermine our economic security.

However, since January 20th, we have seen a shift in priorities by this Administration away from data-driven, security-focused approaches and towards impossible, politically driven goals—like a million removals in a year. Leadership at DHS, and ICE in particular, are operating with disrespect and disregard for the foundational constitutional principles that govern our country.

As we endeavor to secure the homeland, we must continue to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. As I told the Secretary last week, that is not a secondary mission. But under the Trump Administration, ICE's work appears to be dominated by

egregious mistakes, misuse of taxpayer funds, and flagrant violations of constitutional rights like due process.

Let's take last month in Oklahoma, where ICE sent 20 armed agents, with their rifles drawn, to storm the home of a mom who was home alone with her young daughters in the middle of the night. These American citizens, who did nothing wrong, were forced to wait outside their home in the rain during a midnight investigation that had nothing to do with them. Agents reportedly confiscated not just their phones and laptops but also their cash savings.

Again, these are U.S. citizens who, based on publicly available information, were never implicated in any of the crimes being investigated. It is not even clear whether the family's devices and savings were ever returned to them.

Your Department has issued no apology, taken no accountability, just doubled down. How can Americans trust an organization that operates like this, that treats them like this, with their national security?

ICE is the second-largest law enforcement component within DHS, America's largest Federal law enforcement agency. You are charged with upholding our laws, which start with the Constitution and Bill of Rights, representing our values as Americans, and using taxpayer dollars responsibly. And the standard we expect from our Federal law enforcement is excellence. The American people deserve nothing less.

But instead of prioritizing the actual greatest threats facing America—because we all know the data shows encounters at the southern border started declining in March of 2024 and keep hitting new lows—this administration is cashing checks it does not have to reach questionable goals it cannot meet. You are removing people so hastily and with so little care that you are defying court orders.

Your Department is wasting millions flying the Secretary around the country for publicity stunts so that she can post photos on social media from operations that are still ongoing, putting actual agents at risk.

Let me be clear: You are roughly 2 months away from running out of funding and a violation of the Antideficiency Act. As I said to Secretary Noem, the reliance on funding from a reconciliation bill that has not passed Congress is an incredibly risky strategy that sets you up for failure.

Lastly, let me remind you of Article I of the Constitution, which gives Congress—and only Congress—the power of the purse. Increases to ICE at the expense of other national-security programs and initiatives that Members on both sides of the aisle voted for undermine our core work and congressional intent. And if this committee provides funding for your agency, we have every right to oversee how those taxpayer dollars are spent.

Last week, ICE blocked Members of Congress from conducting an unannounced inspection at the Delaney Hall facility in New Jersey. That, too, appears to be in violation of Federal law, which clearly states that we have the right to enter ICE facilities even if we show up unannounced.

Mr. Lyons, you cannot accept Federal funding and then shut the door on oversight from the people's elected representatives.

ICE is already burning the money Congress appropriated, and, frankly, right now, ICE has much more work to do to justify being entrusted with even more taxpayer dollars. I am deeply concerned about the administration of funds by this Department, but ICE in particular, and I am glad we have the opportunity to discuss this further with you today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you.

We will now turn to committee members for questions, and we will start—oh.

You know, I keep trying to cancel opening statements by agency heads, and I want you to know it is nothing personal.

The floor is yours, Mr. Lyons, for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF TODD LYONS

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, sir.

Good morning. Chairman Amodei, Acting Ranking Member Underwood, and distinguished members of this committee, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

As I have said many times, I am honored to lead the most versatile and agile agency under the Department of Homeland Security. I am proud to stand along and represent more than 20,000 ICE personnel, whose determination and resolve drive them to protect national security and promote public safety even in communities who fundamentally disagree with U.S. immigration law and attempt to undermine our investigations and enforcement actions at every turn.

Our officers and agents are villainized for upholding and enforcing law, but the bottom line is, they put their lives on the line to serve this Nation and protect our families, friends, and neighbors.

In light of their service and sacrifice, one of my main priorities is to keep ICE running smoothly. I can do that by working with you to ensure we have the resources we need to keep our workforce safe, keep promises made by President Trump and Secretary Noem, and meet our obligations to the American people. That is why these people are depending on me and you to secure those resources.

In just over 3 months, the Trump administration has significantly increased our operational tempo. We have arrested more than 88,000 aliens so far during 2025, which is a 39-percent increase from the same time period in fiscal year 2024. Of those arrests, 65 percent took place after January 20th, the day President Trump took office and took action on his pledge to make America safe again.

We have also arrested 95 percent more suspected gang members, 655 more known or suspected terrorists, and 46 percent more aliens with pending criminal charges or convictions over the same time period.

After years of being told to stand down instead of investigating, arresting, and removing the most dangerous criminal aliens from our community, ICE's brave officers and agents are now allowed to do what they signed up for: enforce immigration law in the interior.

But, it is not just about our enforcement personnel. During fiscal year 2024, ICE's Office of the Principal Legal Advisor represented the Department of Homeland Security in more than 1.8 million removal hearings and obtained more than 280,000 removal orders.

With our increased operational tempo since President Trump took office, we have more criminal aliens in custody and more cases going before the Department of Justice immigration judges. Our attorneys are working around the clock to preserve the rule of law and protect our fellow Americans from the most dangerous threats to our republic.

I would also ask for resources for our mission support staff who ensure we bring in talented, capable, and agile officers and special agents. These dedicated professionals maintain our information-technology structure, ensure our workforce has the support they need, and serve as stewards to all ICE resources.

Our officers and agents arrest some of the most heinous criminals that are responsible for crimes against our community. They enforce immigration law in the interior, keeping dangerous criminal aliens out of our neighborhood and away from people we care about, and remove the illegal aliens who refuse to follow the legal immigration pathway to make their homes in the United States. They serve as protective shields between Americans and the people who pose the greatest threat to our values, our freedoms, and our way of life.

We need adequate funding to fully execute the responsibilities Congress has given us and to uphold our obligations to the American people. That is why I am sitting here before you today asking for your agreement with the resources requested in the fiscal year 2026 Presidential budget.

Again, I thank you for allowing me to speak with you today, and I look forward to answering your questions and giving you the information you need.

[The information follows:]



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

STATEMENT

OF

TODD M. LYONS

ACTING DIRECTOR

U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

REGARDING A HEARING ON

"Oversight of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement"

BEFORE THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Wednesday, May 14, 2025
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
10:00 a.m.

Introduction

Chairman Amodei, Acting Ranking Member Underwood, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is exceedingly proud of its workforce for their dedication to the agency's responsibilities to the American public while maintaining a culture of integrity, courage, and excellence. I am extremely proud to serve beside our over 20,000-person workforce and am thankful for the opportunity to highlight their work and the impact of that work on national security and public safety.

Despite routine villainization, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement employees, especially our law enforcement officers and agents, remain resilient and mission focused. Brave officers and agents are on the streets every day, risking their lives to locate, arrest, and remove the most egregious criminal aliens in line with the President's policy of "worst first." U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement continues to prove it can implement and execute highly impactful programs strengthening national security and public safety.

On behalf of our workforce, I thank you for your ongoing support to our agency and for providing the critical resources needed to better enable U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to accomplish our critical mission. I look forward to working with Congress on the Fiscal Year 2026 budget and ensuring U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement can meet its immigration enforcement, public safety, and national security missions.

Homeland Security Investigations

As one of the country's premier federal law enforcement agencies, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is dedicated to detecting and dismantling transnational criminal networks targeting the American people and threatening our industries, organizations, and financial systems. Because of its unique authorities and footprint, Homeland Security Investigations is best positioned to investigate and dismantle Transnational Criminal Organizations. Homeland Security Investigations comprises approximately 8,800 personnel across 243 domestic locations and more than 90 international locations. It leverages more than 4,500 task force officers from various federal, state, tribal, territorial, and local partners. Homeland Security Investigations' mission includes combating a wide range of transnational crimes, including terrorism, human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, drug trafficking, human smuggling, and cybercrime.

Under Executive Order 14159, signed by President Trump on January 20, 2025, Homeland Security Investigations and partners from Department of Justice have taken steps to establish Homeland Security Task Forces in all states and U.S. territories. The Homeland Security Task Forces are charged with investigating, prosecuting, and removing criminal cartels, foreign gangs, and Transnational Criminal Organizations operating in the United States. Homeland Security Investigations coordinates Homeland Security Task Force activities through a national command center in collaboration with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, other federal law enforcement partners, U.S. Attorney's Offices, and relevant state, tribal, territorial, and local law enforcement agencies. Each Homeland Security Task Force targets the most prolific Foreign Terrorist Organization targets. The Homeland Security Task Force network aligns with Executive Orders 14159 and 14157 and is focused on dismantling cross-border human smuggling and human trafficking networks, especially those involving children, and enforcing U.S. immigration laws.

Under the Trump Administration, Homeland Security Investigations has aggressively pursued investigations into Tren de Aragua, a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. Since January 20, 2025, Homeland Security Investigations has arrested 1,182 Tren de Aragua members and associates, 373 of whom have been or will be charged with violations of federal criminal law. On April 21, 2025, Homeland Security Investigations and the Department of Justice announced two superseding indictments charging 27 individuals currently or formerly associated with Tren de Aragua with racketeering conspiracy, sex trafficking conspiracy, drug trafficking conspiracy, robbery, and firearms offenses. This indictment marks the first time Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act charges have been filed against the Tren de Aragua Foreign Terrorist Organization and its members.

Homeland Security Investigations' International Operations, in collaboration with Transnational Criminal Investigative Units in foreign partner locations, has served as a critical force multiplier in enhancing global security and addressing the Tren de Aragua threat, resulting in the identification of Tren de Aragua members in the United States with foreign criminal records, including International Criminal Police Organization Red Notices.

In Fiscal Year 2025, the Visa Security Program has already screened more than 1.8 million visa applications, identifying more than 5,500 applicants having a nexus to terrorism. Additionally, more than 370 watchlist nominations were approved based on Visa Security Program-vetted information. Biometric Identification Transnational Migration Alert Program foreign partners enrolled 21,003 subjects, resulting in more than 250 terrorist links and 46 International Criminal Police Organization matches. Homeland Security Investigations' International Operations has independently watchlisted 309 foreign terrorists, including 47 Foreign Terrorist Organization members. These programs have been critical in identifying known or suspected terrorists and members of Transnational Criminal Organizations and Foreign Terrorist Organizations prior to reaching U.S. borders.

Homeland Security Investigations, along with federal partners, are working to ensure approximately 84,000 unaccompanied alien children, with whom the Department of Homeland Security has had no contact since being released from the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement during the previous administration, have met their immigration obligations and are not being trafficked or exploited. Homeland Security Investigations responds to every unaccompanied alien child border encounter to investigate potential human smuggling violations that brought them to the United States and leverages the interagency forced labor initiative, Homeland Security Task Forces, worksite investigations, and national awareness campaigns to address at-risk alien children. Since the unaccompanied alien children initiative commenced in February 2025, over 1,500 individuals have been arrested, including 361 criminal and 1,216 administrative arrests. More specifically, 314 sponsors have been arrested with 278 placed in immigration removal proceedings. Additionally, there have been 247 criminal, and 405 administrative arrests related to the entry of new unaccompanied alien children at the Southwest Border.

The Homeland Security Investigations Victim Assistance Program was recently codified through the passage of the Investigators Maintain Purposeful Awareness to Combat Trafficking Trauma Program Act. This legislation mandates a designated number of Victim Assistance Specialists and Forensic Interview Specialists be maintained in each Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent in Charge office. The involvement of the Victim Assistance Program in investigations not only supports victim recovery but also enhances victim

engagement and participation throughout the criminal justice process. This, in turn, strengthens criminal cases, prosecution outcomes, and contributes to safer communities. In Fiscal Year 2024, the Victim Assistance Program supported 3,715 victims and conducted 2,033 forensic interviews. To ensure the Victim Assistance Program can continue to meet the needs of victims, additional funding and hiring authorities will be necessary.

Worksite Enforcement is a critical component of Homeland Security Investigations' efforts to ensure employers are held accountable for their hiring practices and employment records. The program aims to ensure criminal prosecution and seizure of illicitly gained assets from employers who exploit employees or knowingly hire or continue to employ unauthorized aliens. Homeland Security Investigations' worksite enforcement strategy leverages both civil and criminal authorities, with particular focus on the financial gains of egregious employers. In Fiscal Year 2025, Homeland Security Investigations initiated more than 2,600 worksite enforcement cases, made nearly 850 arrests, served more than 900 Notices of Inspection and issued nearly 50 Notices of Intent to Fine, with an amount totaling approximately \$14 million related to worksite enforcement. By comparison, for the entirety of Fiscal Year 2024, Homeland Security Investigations initiated 830 worksite enforcement cases, made 283 arrests, served 265 Notices of Inspection and 90 Notices of Intent to Fine, and seized more than \$11 million related to worksite enforcement.

Homeland Security Investigations' top line budgets remained virtually the same from Fiscal Year 2024 to 2025. However, the Fiscal Year 2026 request will enable Homeland Security Investigations to address the entire Homeland Security Investigations portfolio, which is dedicated to implementing the administration's priorities and continuing to address the increasing and ever-evolving criminal syndicates.

Enforcement and Removal Operations

Enforcement and Removal Operations protects the homeland through the arrest and removal of aliens undermining the safety of U.S. communities and the integrity of U.S. immigration laws. Its 7,600-plus personnel, including approximately 6,000 law enforcement officers, are spread across 25 domestic field offices, approximately 180 sub-locations nationwide, and more than 30 overseas postings. Enforcement and Removal Operations' primary areas of focus are interior enforcement operations, management of the agency's detained and non-detained populations, and removal efforts. The Enforcement and Removal Operations workforce is critical to reaching the Administration's goal of conducting one million illegal alien removals per year.

Enforcement and Removal Operations arrests aliens for administrative violations of U.S. immigration law. The agency conducts these enforcement actions through at-large and custodial arrests when its officers have probable cause to believe an alien is removable from the United States. Over the course of the fiscal year, Enforcement and Removal Operations has expanded its immigration enforcement actions and operations by including officers from other federal agencies. Federal law enforcement officers from the Department of Justice, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the Department of the Treasury have assisted Enforcement and Removal Operations officers for a more effective, whole-of-government approach.

Under the Trump Administration, these increased immigration enforcement efforts have led to the arrest of a higher number of aliens than in previous years. For example, increased immigration enforcement resulted in the arrest of 88,872 aliens in Fiscal Year 2025, an increase

of 39 percent compared to the same period in Fiscal Year 2024.¹ Moreover, 57,312 of those arrests, or 65 percent, took place after January 20, 2025, clearly reflecting the Administration's focus on increased immigration enforcement by faithfully executing the immigration laws of the United States.

Since January 20, 2025, the number of suspected gang member arrests increased 95 percent compared to the same period in Fiscal Year 2024.² These arrests include members of the Mara Salvatrucha and Tren de Aragua terrorist organizations, two transnational poly-criminal organizations posing grave threats to U.S. national security. Similarly, the number of known or suspected terrorists arrested since January 20, 2025, has increased by 655 percent compared to the same period in Fiscal Year 2024.³ Since January 20, 2025, Enforcement and Removal Operations has arrested 44,846 aliens with criminal histories, including criminal convictions and pending criminal charges at the time of arrest. This is a 46 percent increase over the same period in Fiscal Year 2024.⁴

As part of the increased immigration enforcement, the Department of Homeland Security deputized an unprecedented number of state and local law enforcement officials to work with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to identify and apprehend aliens who entered the United States illegally and those who violated the conditions of their legal admission to the United States. One avenue for increased cooperation and coordination with state and local law enforcement is the 287(g) program which allows U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to delegate the authority to perform specified immigration officer functions under the agency's direction and oversight to state and local law enforcement officers. Under the Trump Administration, there has been an historic expansion of the 287(g) program. At the start of the fiscal year, only two models were utilized within the 287(g) program: the Jail Enforcement Model and Warrant Service Officer program. Subsequently, in Fiscal Year 2025, the Task Force Model was implemented allowing participating state and local law enforcement agencies who encounter illegal aliens during their police duties to transfer arrested aliens to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody who would otherwise have evaded detection. As of April 23, 2025, a total of 456 287(g) memoranda of agreement in 38 states are in place. Moreover, 386 of these agreements were signed after January 20, 2025.

Since President Trump resumed office, Enforcement and Removal Operations' enhanced enforcement operations and routine daily operations have resulted in a significant number of arrests of aliens with criminal histories and who pose national security or public safety threats, requiring greater detention capacity. As of the end of April 2025, there are nearly 50,000 aliens in Enforcement and Removal Operations detention. However, to meet the needs of rising apprehensions, we are diligently working to increase bedspace. Since January 20, 2025, Enforcement and Removal Operations has increased detention capacity by nearly 10,500 beds.

Under its Title 8 authority, Enforcement and Removal Operations officers remove aliens from the United States subject to final orders of removal issued by an immigration judge or other lawful orders, including high-priority aliens who pose serious threats to public safety or national security such as suspected gang members and known or suspected terrorists. In Fiscal Year 2025,

¹ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrest data is current through April 23, 2025.

² Fiscal Year 2025 suspected Foreign Terrorist Organization gang member data is current from January 20, 2025 through April 23, 2025.

³ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrest data is current through April 23, 2025.

⁴ Fiscal Year 2025 arrests of aliens with criminal histories from January 20, 2025, through April 23, 2025.

through April 23, 2025, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement removed 2,987 suspected gang members. Of those, 1,794, or 60 percent, were removed since President Trump resumed office.⁵ Similarly, the 200 known or suspected terrorists removed since January 20, 2025, account for 75 percent of the total removed in Fiscal Year 2025.⁶ Enforcement and Removal Operations also focuses on removing aliens posing threats to public safety, including those with criminal histories. Since January 20, 2025, 55 percent of the illegal aliens removed have criminal histories, including charges and convictions for assault, homicide, and many other egregious crimes.⁷ These figures demonstrate the tenacity of our workforce to protect the United States from aliens who pose national security or public safety threats.

Enforcement and Removal Operations' workforce has remained relatively static in recent years even as officer caseloads continue to grow. Despite expanded coordination efforts with its law enforcement partners, additional resources and personnel are required to accommodate increasing workload in executing its national security and public safety mission.

Office of the Principal Legal Advisor

With over 1,800 attorneys and 440 support personnel in 25 domestic field locations, the Office of the Principal Legal Advisor is the largest legal program in the Department of Homeland Security and one of the largest law offices in the nation. Office of the Principal Legal Advisor attorneys advise U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel on a wide range of matters, including criminal, administrative, and civil customs and immigration laws and authorities, and provide critical legal guidance to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's operational components. The Office of the Principal Legal Advisor serves as the federal government's exclusive representative in removal proceedings before the Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review.

In Fiscal Year 2024, the Office of the Principal Legal Advisor represented the Department of Homeland Security in more than 1.8 million removal hearings before EOIR. This number includes master calendar hearings, hearings held for pleadings, scheduling, and other similar matters, and other individual hearings where substantive legal arguments and applications for relief and protection from removal were presented and decided. In Fiscal Year 2024, the Department of Homeland Security also obtained 287,000 removal orders and managed more than 1,900 human rights violator cases and over 5,100 national security cases nationwide.

Office of the Principal Legal Advisor attorneys, paralegals, researchers, and support personnel work under tremendous caseloads related to removal proceedings and a variety of immigration laws while also providing counsel to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials. Currently, the disparity between Office of the Principal Legal Advisor attorneys and Office for Immigration Review judges is 698 personnel, 509 attorneys and 189 support staff. The Office of the Principal Legal Advisor needs the resources and personnel requested in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2026 President's Budget to meet mission requirements.

Mission Support

Under Executive Order 14159, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is proud to have reestablished the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement office. This office serves as a

⁵ Fiscal Year 2025 removal data is current from January 20, 2025 to April 23, 2025.

⁶ Fiscal Year 2025 removal data is current from January 20, 2025 to April 23, 2025.

⁷ Fiscal Year 2025 removal data is current from January 20, 2025 to April 23, 2025.

resource for Americans who have been victimized by aliens, including those in the country illegally. The office provides information on the immigration status of offenders and connects victims to local victim services. Since its reestablishment after the previous administration shut it down, the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement office has fielded nearly 53,000 calls requesting case status for criminal aliens and has assisted 160 victims of crimes committed by immigrants.

The Mission Support workforce at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement serves a pivotal role in our national security and public safety missions. These dedicated professionals address the agency's expansive operational needs by providing a solid, integrated information technology infrastructure; a dynamic human capital program encompassing proactive recruitment endeavors and pre-employment suitability; the development of acquisition strategies and oversight of procurement activities and contracts; and sound and prudent stewardship of all U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement resources.

As U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement ramps up its operational tempo, it is imperative the agency receives the resources requested in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2026 President's Budget to support its mission-critical operations. These resources will ensure foundational services are fortified and continue to advance in key areas. This includes improvements to hiring timelines, which would enable the agency to swiftly and efficiently onboard new talent, thereby maintaining a robust and capable workforce. Furthermore, maintaining essential training for front-line personnel is crucial, as it ensures staff are well-prepared and equipped with the latest knowledge and skills to perform duties effectively and safely.

Conclusion

By providing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement with the resources requested in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2026 President's Budget, we can make certain the agency remains capable of effectively executing its critical national security and public safety mission.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify today. I am honored and humbled to represent the brave men and women of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement who work so hard to keep the American public safe. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you, sir.

Mrs. Hinson, the floor is yours for 5 minutes.

STAFF. Ms. Underwood.

Mr. AMODEI. What if I don't want to go to Ms. Underwood? Okay.

Madam Ranking Member, the floor is yours for 5 minutes.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Director Lyons, in fiscal year 2024, ICE was provided funding to support 41,500 detention beds. This was agreed to by Congress and carried forward in the fiscal year 2025 continuing resolution.

Whether the administration likes it or not, that is what the law provided. And with ICE's current bed count at over 52,000 beds just last week, you are not abiding by the law.

As I mentioned in my opening, you are maybe 1 or 2 months away from running out of funds to support this current level of operations. If reconciliation doesn't pass before the end of the fiscal year, what is your plan to avoid an Antideficiency Act violation?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you for your question, ma'am. And I appreciate you recognizing the good work, earlier in your statement, that Immigration and Customs Enforcement does. The men and women really appreciate your support.

Counting on reconciliation is not a plan, ma'am, and that is not what we are doing. ICE will not run out of money, because we are fiscally responsible to ensure that we meet what the Appropriations Committee has outlined for us and what Congress has given us, to work within the means, in order to keep our operations going smoothly and ensure that we are protecting the American people.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. So what you characterize as "fiscal responsibility"—we know that the Department is already trying to take funding from CBP and CISA, and that will only get you through June.

It sounds like there is no plan to get ICE back to following the law and the direction of 41,500 beds, even with DHS encounter numbers, quote, "at record lows." You are claiming success and demanding more, and the justifications we are seeing from this administration just aren't adding up.

Mr. Lyons, with the power of the purse lying in the Congress, and if DHS continues to spend like this, we will have to look at how we can tighten those strings.

Moving on. Like most Americans, I am alarmed that ICE is trying to build more detention facilities while reducing oversight of those facilities at the same time.

Last week, DHS accused Members of Congress who were exercising their oversight responsibilities of, quote, "illegally breaking in" to an ICE facility in New Jersey. The Department's spokesperson said, quote, "Had these Members requested a tour, we would have facilitated a tour of the facility."

Mr. Lyons, Members of Congress do not have to request a tour of ICE detention centers to be allowed in. Federal law explicitly requires you to admit us, even if we show up unannounced without previously requesting a tour.

In light of this incident, what actions are you taking to ensure ICE employees know the law and are following it? And have you issued a memo or guidance to the workforce clarifying that Mem-

bers of Congress must be admitted in these circumstances, or are you requiring additional training?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, ma'am, for that question. I appreciate it.

Ma'am, I will go back to the Consolidated Appropriations Act from 2020. The staff knows that we are fully supportive to ensure that the oversight that is granted by law, by this Committee, is abided by so we have proper access and oversight from the men and women of your Committee and Congress to oversee what Immigration and Customs Enforcement are doing in our detention centers. We have nothing to hide. I am here with a promise that ICE will be fully transparent.

We do acknowledge that any Member of Congress does have the right to show up for an inspection of one of our facilities in their oversight capacity. In these situations, we would ask that, while it is unannounced, that Congress, elected officials, do respect and are in accordance with the Appropriations Act in Section 532—presentation of ID, to go through screening, and don't bring any contraband, things like that.

We do also—and I would like to just, you know, point out that congressional staff does require 24 hours. We did encounter that over this weekend, and we did address that, and it was handled properly, and, those tours have been scheduled.

So, yes, ma'am, the staff is fully aware of the Appropriations Act of 2020, specifically 532, which grants that oversight.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Okay. Excellent. The law is unambiguous on this issue, and we expect ICE to follow the law.

With my remaining time, I want to discuss the deaths in ICE custody. In just the last 4 months, we have seen at least seven deaths.

Since 2018, ICE has had a congressional requirement to make this information publicly available on its website, but there is a 90-day delay, and it seems to be missing at least three more recent deaths in custody that we have received notifications about.

To date, what is the total number of deaths in ICE custody since January 20, 2025?

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

Our total deaths in custody right now is up to nine.

We do conduct a thorough investigation on all of those, between the Office of Professional Responsibility as well as the local jurisdiction as well.

ICE is, as I said, dedicated to transparency, and I will assure, ma'am, as a get-back, that we get all that information back to you and staff.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. And publicly available online, as pursuant to the congressional directive?

Mr. LYONS. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Does anybody have any objection if I go to Mrs. Hinson next?

Seeing none—

Mr. CUELLAR. What State?

Mr. AMODEI. Iowa, last I heard.

Mrs. HINSON. The best State in the Nation. That is right, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. AMODEI. Mrs. Hinson, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mrs. HINSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Acting Director Lyons. Thank you so much for being here today.

I want to commend the men and women at ICE for the work that you do and President Trump for issuing that directive to get back to real enforcement of our immigration laws. And I want to thank you for your unwavering commitment to doing that and for coming to testify here today.

Our borders are more secure than ever because of that leadership. And ICE is, I know, working tirelessly, putting lives on the line every single day, to take, as you mentioned, the most dangerous criminals out of our communities every single day. And, these are people who have entered our country illegally, breaking our laws.

That mission does become significantly harder when local jurisdictions are not cooperating and, instead, are willfully choosing to put the safety and security of their communities at risk and the lives of your agents at risk as well.

Sanctuary city policies not only undermine Federal law enforcement but they also create safe havens for bad actors. They obstruct access to critical data and information and disrupt efforts to dismantle the transnational criminal networks and the gangs that are exploiting our immigration system, endangering public safety, and continue to funnel illicit activity—drugs, fentanyl, and human trafficking—into our communities.

So, what challenges, Acting Director, do you face when local jurisdictions refuse those detainer requests for your agents or are barring access to databases that could give you that critical information that you need to link to those criminal networks? Are there legacy programs or maybe even holdover administrative burdens that you recommend eliminating as a result of that?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, ma'am. I appreciate that. And I appreciate your respect for what the men and women of ICE do every day. They are true to the mission they swore to serve, and they do put their lives on the line every day. And, so I appreciate you recognizing that.

One thing about sanctuary cities is, sanctuary city policies, while they are there to protect the migrant community, also puts communities at risk as well. It allows violent criminal aliens to go back into a setting that they were already removed from by a law enforcement agency. A law enforcement agency already deemed that individual as a public safety threat and arrested them and put them in custody.

What ICE would look for to keep not only the community safe, but the officers and agents of ICE safe is to work with sanctuary cities to take those individuals into custody in a secure location—one that it is not outside in the community, one where it doesn't put officers at risk, and one where it doesn't put the actual criminal alien at risk.

One other thing I would say about the lack of information-sharing is, under the previous administration, there were many individuals that were released into the United States without proper vetting. Without having access to systems like driver's license databases, registry of motor vehicles, or to have police reports to know what these bad actors did in the past, it really hampers our ability to track and find these individuals.

One thing that ICE is dedicated to, especially with the Department of Homeland Security, is tracking illicit drugs and fentanyl. When these drug dealers are allowed to get back in our community and we can't find them because a sanctuary policy blocks our ability to have that information and track these individuals, it is not making the community any safer.

Mrs. HINSON. Right.

Mr. LYONS. These individuals are out there dealing illicit drugs, and it is hampering our ability.

Mrs. HINSON. Yeah. And I have no doubt that people have died because of those sanctuary city policies. And we need to do everything we can to protect American citizens, so, again, thank you for that information.

And please let us know if there are policies we need to be looking at changing to make sure that those folks are cooperating with you. I think Iowa is a good example of a State that I work with our local law enforcement and have those conversations, and there is good information-sharing. And, we want to make sure that is happening all over the country.

I want to shift gears a little bit and highlight HSI's critical role in combating trade-based crimes. Many of those are driven by the Chinese Communist Party. Those include forced-labor violations, IP theft, transshipment schemes that are really posing a direct threat to our American workers and our small businesses, devastating our American manufacturers and our supply chains here in the United States.

What additional tools, personnel, or legal authorities does HSI need to more effectively, number one, investigate but also to prosecute these trade-related violations that are, again, undermining our economy here in the United States?

Mr. LYONS. Well, thank you, ma'am, for that question. And thank you for recognizing what HSI does. Homeland Security Investigations is a key part to Department of Homeland Security. It is instrumental to what ICE does in keeping this Nation safe.

While we have increased Title 8 civil immigration enforcement, we are extremely focused on threats outside our borders, especially from the People's Republic of China. That is one thing that we would look for more support and technology, more innovation to help us with these tools for these databases overseas, as well as more officers and intel agents and analysts that could work with us to really identify these foreign-national threats that really are affecting our infrastructure.

Because that is one key part that Homeland Security can do, is not only help protect outside the United States, but help key critical infrastructure and trade here in the United States and keep those secrets safe.

Mrs. HINSON. Well, we are certainly trying to work on that. I have a piece of legislation, Protecting American Industry and Labor from International Trade Crimes Act, that would give your law enforcement partners a little bit more resources to be able to do that, so, hopefully we can get that passed.

And thank you so much, sir, for appearing before us today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, ma'am. I appreciate it.

Mr. AMODEI. The pride of the Gulf Coast, from the Lone Star State, Mr. Cuellar—

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman—

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. Is recognized for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member. Thank you so much.

And thank you, Director, for being here with us. I appreciate the work that the men and women do for ICE. I have been working with them since I first got started here. In fact, I started off with one of your agents, Al Pena, who I think became Deputy Director of ICE some years ago.

When we were in Laredo, we started the BEST program. That is the Border Enforcement Security Task Force. Since then, we put it into language; we have expanded it. I think you have got over 70, and it goes after the cartels for drugs, trade, et cetera, et cetera.

How is that coming along, the BEST programs?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, sir, for bringing it up. And I appreciate the work of former Deputy Director Pena.

The BEST program is an excellent program. It does protect our homeland, specifically through the work of what Homeland Security Investigations does, not only for the criminal cartels but illicit activity and long-term investigations on the border.

Recently, the President signed the Executive Order with the establishment of the Homeland Security Task Forces. I think the Committee will be happy with the results of what these task forces will do. It will bring to bear all the Federal resources of Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security to focus on these transnational gangs, these ones that are bringing in fentanyl, these illicit drugs that are coming into our communities.

Not only that, but they will focus on these transnational cartel organizations, along with foreign terrorist organizations that do threaten our border, not only the Southern border but the Northern border, as well as our maritime interdiction, which has increased greatly.

Just last night, Homeland Security Investigations had their first indictment for support of terrorism material in San Diego, which is one of the actions that you will see coming out of the Homeland Security Task Forces.

Mr. CUELLAR. Good. Well, I appreciate the good work that the program does.

Are we still at about 1.3 million final deportation orders?

I know your work is very hard. And then I remember Director Morgan many years ago. Some people want you to do more; some

people think you are doing too much, so, trying to find that balance is always difficult.

But, where are we on the 1.3 million final deportation orders? And I don't know if that is still the correct number.

Mr. LYONS. Yes, sir. It is approximately 1.1 million final deportation orders.

We are actively still prioritizing those and attempting to effect those removals. As the President has said, under Secretary Noem, we did prioritize and we still are prioritizing the worst of the worst.

However, during our investigations and when we are out in the communities, should we encounter someone that has a final order and has been lawfully ordered removed or deported from the United States, ICE is going to uphold their sworn duty and take that individual into custody and effect that removal order.

But, to your question, sir, ICE is actively working on those final orders at this time.

Mr. CUELLAR. Good. Yeah, and I understand what happens if you run into somebody. You can't just close your eyes. But, as long as you focus on criminals and final deportation orders, national-security threats, that would be good.

Let me go back to—it is actually Section 527. I am very familiar because myself and some other folks, we added that language. In fact, we added language on oversight of the detention, because ICE doesn't really have detention, so you have to go to the private sector to do that.

But, we put specific language, one, where a Member of Congress does not—it says specifically—doesn't have to give notice. Staff might have to give notice, but Members can go in and act accordingly, number one.

And, then, on the oversight, health, food, you know, whatever needs to be provided to the folks that are being detained, we have very specific language to make sure that those private contractors are following that and you all are following that oversight that Congress has set up.

Mr. LYONS. Yes, sir. Yes, we are.

And that is one of—one of the things that I am proud of is, ICE does have some of the highest detention standards. But, unfortunately, that does hinder a lot of local partners partnering with us, because, due to the high standards that ICE has, it is cost-prohibitive for a local law enforcement agency, State, or a sheriff's department to actually enter into ICE, because they would not be able to afford.

Mr. CUELLAR. Okay.

And just finally, years ago we started the border processing coordinators for Border Patrol, because we wanted Border Patrol to be out in the fields and not changing diapers, making sandwiches for migrants—very important, but not for the agents.

We want more support staff for you all. So, make sure you keep asking for the support staff so you can have the agents doing their work instead of sitting down behind a desk.

It worked very well for Border Patrol. We did a lot of things for Border Patrol—border processing support staff, mental health support staff because everybody goes through that situation.

So just make sure you ask the Committee for that support.

Mr. LYONS. Yes, sir. Thank you. I appreciate you bringing that up. Thank you.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you so much.

Mr. AMODEI. The Chair now recognizes for 5 minutes for his questions the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Ciscomani.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Thank you, sir. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Acting Director Lyons, for being here. Thank you for the work you have already done and you have been doing for our country, for leading the men and women in ICE—a very important task. It is something that the American public clearly had their focus on when we talked about this all last year and then what we saw here in the last 4 years specifically so, it is very important work and also a tall task.

I visited the Eloy Detention Center just—the detention facility in my district—this Monday. So, I was just there this week, and I got to see, obviously, the operations of it, and it was quite eye-opening. I have known a lot about this issue for a long time, but visiting there helped me understand things even a little better, and also the challenges that we are facing.

Obviously, this Administration has made a stated goal of removing a million people a year. That is the goal. That is to Mr. Cuellar's point as well. And, after my visit to Eloy, I think I better understand the complexity of what needs to happen for us to meet that goal, how expensive that can be as well.

To be frank with you, it was very eye-opening to see what is happening now versus what was happening just a year ago, and not only disappointed in what was happening but pretty shocked. And it is scary to see what was happening, the releases that were going on, the lack of cooperation with other countries to be able to deport people there, how we have shifted from just deporting to some of the neighboring countries to now having to fly them all across the world now.

So, the challenges are so different than any other Administration has ever faced. So, with that, can you speak to the resources that you are going to need to increase deportations to be able to reach that goal of a million a year?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, sir. I appreciate that. I appreciate you going to visit the men and women down there. They appreciate your support and the opportunity to show you exactly the challenges they face.

One of the challenges we have, sir, is, ICE doesn't detain in a punitive way; we detain to remove. So, one of the hindrances we have for us is the ability to actually—when people have gone through their due process and gone through the immigration proceedings—we have to effectively remove them in a safe and humane way. That would rely on more airplanes, more charter companies, things of that nature, to effectively remove them so they don't have to be in custody that long. You know, that is one of the—one of the price points with detention is, it is a high cost.

But, again, we don't hold for punitive reasons; we hold to remove. So, the ability to remove people quickly and safely and humanely is something that we would need.

We would also need assistance with the immigration backlog with the immigration courts. That is one that is extremely—a bot-

tleneck for us, with all the legal proceedings and the due process and appeal process that illegal aliens have while they are in our detention facilities.

The backlog at the immigration level, in regards to immigration court, it does hinder our abilities to remove people quickly. We hope, with the Committee and what we ask for in the budget, to get some more immigration attorneys, our OPLA attorneys, who do great work for the agency—

Mr. CISCOMANI. Uh-huh.

Mr. LYONS [continuing]. To work with the Department of Justice to streamline that effort.

Mr. CISCOMANI. That is excellent. Those are good points. We will make sure that we give you the support that you need there.

I learned a lot, as well, about the coordination needed for the travel documents from other nations and how some nations are a little more challenging than others—not only the access to those airports, but actually be able to get the documents and how long that takes. So, a lot of challenges that you are dealing with with that.

With the time I have left, I also learned here during my visit—and I was pleased to hear—that most of the jurisdictions around the Eloy facility are cooperating with ICE in terms of communicating and giving ICE access to their jails as well.

I understand that you all are focused on criminal removals. Obviously that is the main one. We have heard horror stories of those released by the previous Administration committing crimes against Americans. And it seems to me that, by coordinating with Federal authorities, our local governments can make our streets safer. You mentioned the risk of sanctuary cities and how that actually puts the community at risk more than anyone else.

So, how many local jurisdictions have entered the 287(g) program, and can we at this Committee help raise that to an even higher number?

Mr. LYONS. Well, thank you, sir, for that.

I would say that ICE, we have increased the 287(g) program over 300 percent. There are, however, a lot of partners now that are signing up to assist with ICE, but those local agencies do need financial support and the legislative backing to continue to work with ICE.

We welcome all partners, because one goal, especially for myself, representing the men and women of ICE, is to be that viable law enforcement partner and be that actual public safety, too, to help communities.

So any cooperation, any support we could get along the lines of the 287(g) program or any legislative or congressional changes to the Immigration and Nationality Act, ICE would welcome that.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you.

The gentleman from Hawaii is recognized for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. CASE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lyons, I am trying to just understand the fiscal year 2026 budget and how it is coming out, especially as it affects ICE.

So, as I understand it, the skinny budget that came out for the overall Department of Homeland Security proposed a substantial increase of about \$43 billion, which was about 65 percent, but all of that is in reconciliation, and I completely endorse the Ranking Member's comments on the complete inappropriateness of the use of reconciliation for base budget decisions.

You also, apparently, are proposing in that skinny budget substantial reductions in the base budget for key Federal agencies such as FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency; the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, or CISA; Transportation Security Administration, key for air travel. So, these are all key agencies, and we obviously disagree with the proposed reductions in those key agencies.

However, if you add that all up, it seems to me that if you are reducing your base budget by \$2 billion that it is going to be increased somewhere else if your net is zero, which I think you have said.

Are you anticipating that there will in fact be an increase in the President's budget in ICE? And where would that increase come from?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, sir. I appreciate that, appreciate the question.

I will actually have to refer to Secretary Noem and her testimony and Department of Homeland Security, sir, as ICE doesn't have any input on CISA, FEMA, or TSA's budgets.

What I would say and what I said to the Ranking Member is, it is fiscally irresponsible for us to rely on reconciliation. My goal is to work with this Committee, work with Members of Congress, to ensure that we are financially responsible and that we work within our means and what the committees legally and through the budget have set for us and we ensure that we spend the American taxpayers'—

Mr. CASE. Let me ask you in a different way then.

Mr. LYONS. Yes, sir.

Mr. CASE. Maybe you can answer this question. Where do you think that the greatest financial stresses are in ICE where you would, in an analysis of ICE, want to increase your base budget?

Mr. LYONS. Yes, sir. Obviously, the one big key piece of the ICE budget is detention space, sir. Detention space in our removal contracts, that is one of the key parts to our budget right now. That is a large piece.

But, also, sir, we are focusing on ensuring that the other programs, much like the one the Ranking Member brought up—Homeland Security Investigations, our Office of the Principal Legal Advisor—that we make sure they have the right tools and resources to focus on the public safety threat to the national-security mission.

Mr. CASE. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. LYONS. Yes, sir.

Mr. CASE. Focusing within ICE on Homeland Security Investigations, HSI, I appreciate my colleague from Iowa's comments. I am very much in support of HSI, both domestically and from the foreign policy perspective, because, as you pointed out in your testimony, crime doesn't stop at our borders, and neither do we.

And so you have, as part of your HSI team, a very extensive team around the world, including—I think it was 90 offices in 50 countries, as I recall.

Are you intending to preserve those offices?

Obviously a rhetorical question, because I do believe that those offices are key to our foreign policy, especially as we are withdrawing in other aspects of our foreign policy. These are key not just for law enforcement but for networking and partnership with our partner and ally countries around the world.

Is there any threat to those offices?

Mr. LYONS. No, sir, there is not.

And I can guarantee you here today that, especially in your region, Indo-Pacific region, that is a key national-security element to the safety and security of the United States. HSI is a key component to that. We are dedicated. Our resources are out there, like I said, in maritime operations, illicit drugs, human trafficking.

And not only that, sir, but we are dedicated to the cyber intelligence and the counterintelligence of that region. When I first became the Acting Director of ICE, one of my first meetings was with the DOD criminal investigative services. I met with NCIS CID. And, specifically, we focused on the Indo-Pacific region in regards to our military bases, to work jointly to ensure that we had no incursion of those bases and to ensure that HSI is a key part of that counterintelligence piece in that region.

Mr. CASE. Okay.

And I would commend to you your Pacific Islands Liaison initiative, which President Trump actually started in the first part of his Administration. That is a key ingredient to be preserved in that context.

I yield the balance of my time to the Ranking Member.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you so much.

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent that a letter from Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez, dated today, May 14th, to the subcommittee regarding events last Friday, May 9th, be inserted for the record.

Mr. AMODEI. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ
14TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

DISTRICT OFFICE
1221 LAFAYETTE AVE
BRONX, NY 10474
(718) 862-5870

WASHINGTON D.C. OFFICE
200 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE
BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3960

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3214

ENERGY & COMMERCE COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT &
INVESTIGATIONS

May 14, 2025

The Honorable Mark Amodei
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lauren Underwood
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Mark Amodei and Ranking Member Lauren Underwood,

As the House Appropriations Committee conducts its Oversight Hearing of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today, I write to submit testimony regarding the apparent violation of Public Law 118-47 (Pub. L. 118-47), Sec. 527 by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

On May 10th, 2025, my staff provided ICE with a notice of a staff delegation visit to the Delaney Hall Detention Facility in Newark, New Jersey to conduct oversight. When they arrived 24 hours later, they were denied entry. ICE agents informed my staff that they were not on the schedule, hence they would not be permitted to enter. They were also informed that scheduling such oversight visits could take up to one week.

I understand agencies must develop protocols to inform their operations. However, these agencies cannot use protocol to avoid or delay congressional oversight. I ask you to review ICE's compliance with current appropriations law and consider conditioning further appropriations on ICE's ability to be responsive to congressional oversight.

I have appended testimony from my Deputy Chief of Staff, Naureen Akhter, recounting ICE apparently violating Sec. 527 of Pub. L. 118-47 on May 11, 2025 by obstructing access to congressional staff seeking to conduct oversight.

Sincerely,



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

Appendix

Testimony for the Record
Submitted to the Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
for the Hearing
“Oversight Hearing of United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement”
May 14, 2025
Naureen Akhter
Deputy Chief of Staff
Office of Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez

On the evening of Friday, May 9th, I learned that a constituent of New York’s 14th congressional district was detained at Delaney Hall Detention Facility (Delaney Hall). His counsel informed my colleague, Michelle Luna, that he did not have adequate access to phone calls to either his family or his lawyer. In order to check on his wellbeing and ensure access to phone calls, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez designated me and my colleague, Michelle, to perform a staff delegation visit to Delaney Hall as authorized by Public Law 118–47 (Pub. L. 118-47), Sec. 527¹.

Pub. L. 118–47, Sec. 527 allows for routine oversight of “any facility operated by or for the Department of Homeland Security used to detain or otherwise house aliens,” by members of Congress and designated congressional staff. Because this statute allows the Department of Homeland Security to require 24 hours’ notice, Michelle provided written notice to the ICE Office of Congressional Relations (OCR) and the Newark Field Office on Saturday afternoon. The only communication our office received came from Assistant Field Office Director Ian Patel, informing Michelle that he was waiting for OCR to schedule the visit and that, without approval from the OCR, we would likely be denied entry.

On Sunday, May 11th, Michelle and I arrived for our visit to Delaney Hall, but were not allowed to enter. At approximately 3:45pm, I approached ICE agent Phantharangsy (badge number 3471), identified myself as congressional staff and showed the 24 hour notice provided to ICE. ICE staff informed me that we were not on the schedule and that no one from ICE headquarters had confirmed a scheduled visit. A transcript of part of my conversation is included below:

Agent Phantharangsy: “I can’t let you in for any visit right now because it wasn’t scheduled...you provided 24 hour notice and we’re supposed to let you in, yes?...but I can’t let you in until you’re scheduled to come in.”

Myself: “Just so you know, you’re violating the law.”

Agent Phantharangsy: “It is what it is. If it’s me, then it’s me.”

Michelle and I were ultimately denied entry. Although ICE OCR has since committed to allowing us to enter Delaney Hall at a different scheduled date and time, this delay impeded our office’s ability to swiftly respond to our constituent’s urgent concerns.

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/118/plaws/publ47/PLAW-118publ47.pdf>

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Does the gentleman yield back?

Mr. CASE. Yes, I yield.

Mr. AMODEI. The Chair recognizes Mr. Gonzales for 5 minutes for his questions.

Mr. GONZALES. Thank you, Chairman.

And thank you, Director. You all have been doing a fantastic job getting back to law and order.

I represent Fort Bliss, and Biggs Airfield has been at the epicenter of getting things back on track. I have visited there several times. These repatriation flights work.

One of the issues or one of the concerns that I have is staffing. You know, when I visited a few weeks ago, I noticed that there was only a handful of civilian coordinators on the ground. You know, when you have three people kind of sharing a shift, that makes it difficult.

My specific question is, what role does ICE have in ensuring that the bases that are actively assisting with repatriation flights, like Fort Bliss, are adequately staffed, especially with civilian personnel?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, sir. I appreciate that, and I thank you for the question.

One of the things recently, under Secretary Noem's leadership and this Administration is the whole-of-government approach we have taken to addressing our current needs within ICE. DOD has been an excellent partner. Specifically, sir, Fort Bliss, Biggs Airfield is a key part to that.

Through our contracting and budgeting, we want to ensure that we actually have men and women, officers and agents, who carry a gun and badge, out protecting the homeland, doing the job that they swore for. It is going to be key for us to recruit and maintain and really hire these key civilian contractors to help us achieve that mission.

By having those contractors working at the facilities, as far as medical care, housing, food, processing, that will ensure that, as I said earlier in my comments, we are moving swiftly—because, since I said, ICE, we do not detain for punitive, we detain to remove—to move that, you know, process quickly, as well as get the men and women who are sworn law enforcement back on the street.

Mr. GONZALES. Excellent. Thank you for that.

Can you speak—how many ICE flights have we performed out of Fort Bliss? Do we know how many illegal aliens we have successfully removed? Details matter.

Mr. LYONS. Yes, sir, and I will take that as a get-back and get that exactly for your office. But ICE daily is doing flights, every day. Just yesterday, we had over 55 missions going international all over the country.

And that is one of the things that I am dedicated to, is ensuring that we do not have a bottleneck in our detention, that we are not clogging up detention space, and those that have actual final orders of removal or detention deportation orders, that we are swiftly and humanely returning those individuals back to their country.

Mr. GONZALES. Excellent. I look forward to continuing to collaborate on this. I want to make sure that ICE and ERO, that you all the resources you need, you have all the personnel, you have all the policy you need to go out and perform your mission.

And I appreciate you working alongside DOD. I think this has been very successful, once again highlighting the fact that Fort Bliss has been the epicenter. It is working. It is working in a very positive manner.

My next question is on task forces. Task forces work, especially HSI-led task forces. ICE is certainly a big part of that as well.

Can you just speak to the importance of it? You know, as we are working through the budget process, we are trying to figure out what works, what doesn't work, what are your thoughts on task forces?

Mr. LYONS. Sir, my thoughts—100 percent, task forces are the key to securing the homeland.

You know, under the Executive Order with the establishment of the Homeland Security Task Forces, there will be Homeland Security Task Forces in every State, addressing those issues at the border, north and south, as well as our maritime operations, but really hammering down on those public-safety threats that are in those communities specific to the States and regions.

And I think the key is having the whole of government come together, between Department of Justice, all of the entities within DHS, bringing all those law enforcement entities together; and the intelligence network that that has will help us cripple or, you know, eradicate these transnational gangs, these transnational terrorist organizations that are actually operating within the border and on the border. I think task forces are the key to that.

Mr. GONZALES. And my last comment is, you know, we had the Secretary, Secretary Noem, testify before us last week, and she highlighted there are over 600,000 confirmed convicted criminal aliens loose in our country. And, that is a huge number, and it is going to take everyone coming together to make sure that that gets taken care of. Once again—convicted in a court of law, criminal illegal aliens—and ICE is going to be key to that.

Thank you for your testimony.

And, Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, sir.

Mr. AMODEI. The gentlelady from Texas, Ms. Escobar, is recognized.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member.

Director Lyons, thank you so much for being here. I appreciate your service to our country.

I represent the border community and the people of El Paso and the people of Fort Bliss. And no one values border security more than those of us who live there and folks like me who have raised our families there.

And while I appreciate the important role Federal agencies like ICE play, especially when it comes to fighting transnational criminal organizations, cartels, fighting illegal drug trafficking, what we have seen under the Trump Administration should send chills down the spine of every American.

The fact is that the Administration is not focusing on the worst of the worst, as it claims. According to public reporting, the focus has largely been on immigrants who are here both legally and those who are here illegally but who mostly pose absolutely no threat to the public.

Students with green cards and visas being snatched by masked men from the streets and disappeared to detention facilities far from their homes. People with legal status, with no criminal history, no criminal record, being targeted for enforcement activities. Members of Congress being denied entry for oversight purposes, despite having the legislative authority to do so. And more. This is the kind of disturbing pattern we see in authoritarian police states, not in a democratic republic.

Most Americans may not know that ICE is a relatively small agency and that the vast majority of Federal funding doesn't go for Federal operations per se; it goes to private prisons and their CEOs. We have also seen certain Members of Congress benefit from the stock trading associated with the growth and expansion of some of these corporations.

Detention facilities should adhere to the strictest of standards that local jails have to, but the track record for some of these private operations is abysmal, and I would characterize what happens inside of them as tantamount to human-rights abuses.

We have seen overcrowding at these facilities, medical negligence leading to a number of deaths, including that of a 27-day-old baby. We have seen children in these facilities whose weight loss has been so severe it is life-threatening, lack of access to toilets and water, inadequate nutrition, and more. In fact, per your testimony this morning, there have been nine deaths so far in the last few months alone.

At the same time, we have seen the costs per bed per day for these facilities increase. The increase in cost to taxpayers obviously hasn't translated into an increase in humane conditions, but I bet it has meant an increase in profits for these private companies. That is what American tax dollars have been funding.

And through the Republican reconciliation bill, we are going to see explosive growth in immigration detention and, therefore, likely explosive growth in what we have seen so far.

Eighty billion dollars of an increase in the reconciliation bill, that is—we are seeing a 365-percent increase for detention annually, a 500-percent increase for transportation annually.

I am wondering, if you have this information, how many total detention beds does the reconciliation package create? In other words, what does that increase in funding via reconciliation translate into in terms of beds? And can you tell us the cost per bed per day that we will see through reconciliation in fiscal year 2025 and 2026?

Mr. LYONS. Thank you, ma'am, for your question.

In regards to reconciliation, ma'am, as I said earlier, ICE is—it is fiscally irresponsible for us to focus on reconciliation, on something that hasn't happened. What we are focused on is working with your Committee and working with Members of Congress to ensure that we do add to our bed-space capacity in the proper and fiscal way.

The main question that you had earlier, ma'am, as far as detention bed space and the cost, that does fluctuate from region to region.

What I would really like to ask this Committee to help on is, in a lot of these sanctuary jurisdictions, where we would not have to work with private corporations, there is a lot of State legislation which bars cooperation with ICE. We would much rather partner with a sheriff's department or a State corrections agency, someone that is in a State where an individual is arrested, that we don't have to transport all around the country due to lack of bed space. We would really appreciate the support on that.

Ms. ESCOBAR. So, Director Lyons, back to my question, have you looked at reconciliation and how much bed space that would create?

Mr. LYONS. Yes, ma'am. We are currently—ICE is—right now, we are forecasting to move forward on 100,000 beds.

But, however, we don't have that money now, and what we are working on is, within our means and the budget that we have been provided, to ensure that we work with this Committee to be financially responsible in the bed space and manage that the correct way.

Ms. ESCOBAR. My final question—and I have more which I will submit to you.

Mr. LYONS. Okay.

Ms. ESCOBAR. But I also represent Fort Bliss. We know for a fact—I used to serve on the House Armed Services Committee. We know for a fact that, in the past when military bases have been used for immigration purposes, it has degraded our military readiness, which is one of the many reasons why I oppose using Fort Bliss for detention.

But, do you know how many beds and the cost per bed that is slated for Fort Bliss?

Mr. LYONS. Ma'am, I would defer to DOD on the cost, as DOD is providing that portion of the budgetary piece.

Fort Bliss, right now we are looking at approximately 3,500 beds at this time.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Mr. Chairman, I am out of time. I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you.

Mr. Acting Director, if you know—and if you don't, then you need to get back to me on this—how many beds is DOD supporting across military installations for detention purposes for you guys? GTMO, Fort Bliss, whatever. Can you give us a ballpark number?

Mr. LYONS. Yes, sir.

Right now at Fort Bliss, we do have 69 detainees at Fort Bliss right now.

We have reached out to other facilities, such as Fort Leonard Wood, Fort Bliss. We are in the process of standing those up.

Some of these are going to be new and existing, so the bed space, I don't have the exact count yet, but I will get you that exact count, sir.

Mr. AMODEI. Okay.

Do you know, is DOD going to bill ICE for that? Is that going to be—how are the books going to be trued up between DOD and

ICE for space in military facilities that are going to be used for detention activities?

Mr. LYONS. Sir, ICE is providing the contracting vehicle, but the funding for that will come out of DOD budget, sir. So, I would have to refer you to DOD on that, sir.

Mr. AMODEI. Okay. So, you don't expect to get a bill from DOD for their facilities for detention?

Mr. LYONS. No, sir.

Mr. AMODEI. How about military airlift? Do you expect to get a bill from DOD for that, or are they going to absorb that in their budget?

Mr. LYONS. No, sir. I would refer you to DOD on that one, sir, for the proper answer. But, no, sir, I do not expect a bill from DOD.

Mr. AMODEI. Okay.

How many additional beds do you anticipate bringing on line with the transferred funding of the \$312.5 million that is the request that you have put in for reprogramming?

Mr. LYONS. We are looking to come on line, sir, up to 60,000 beds at this time.

Mr. AMODEI. And that is through—what is the timeframe for those coming on line?

Mr. LYONS. Through the beginning of fourth quarter this year, sir.

Mr. AMODEI. Okay.

Will you still have a shortfall after this potential transferred funding, do you know?

Mr. LYONS. Sir, I can promise the Committee and I guarantee that we are going to financially work within our means to ensure that we do not have a shortfall, sir.

Mr. AMODEI. Okay.

Finally, on information—this isn't on you, but, frankly, information in a fast-moving budgetary environment is a precious thing. I would appreciate it if you, for your part, would let folks know up your chain of command that this information, if it is not coming in real-time, is not useful, and so I will leave it at that for purposes of our discussion.

And, I want to thank you for your service. I know it is not an easy time to do that. And, obviously, speaking only for myself, I support your goal, but we also at the same time have to keep in mind things like the Antideficiency Act and stuff like that, and I will just be honest with you. Speaking for me, I don't know that I have the information that I need to make sure that we are doing our job in the context of that, so we could really, really use that.

Same thing I have told all other agency directors: we won't surprise you, please do not surprise us.

And so, for members that have get-back questions, I would ask you to respond to those within 15 days of today. We ask also, for additional questions, that it is a 30-day timeline to get that back. Obviously we are moving quickly on trying to move these bills.

Mr. AMODEI. I thank you for your participation in today's hearing.

And the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:52 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBCOMMITTEE HOMELAND SECURITY
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Budget Hearing – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Wednesday, May 14, 2025

Representative Underwood

1. PREA Reporting Mechanisms in ICE Detention Facilities

To: Acting Director Todd Lyons

Compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) is both a statutory obligation and an operational necessity for any civil detention system that receives federal funding.¹

Question: Please confirm whether ICE detainees are ever charged for phone calls made to PREA reporting hotlines, including calls to the DHS Office of Inspector General or any designated internal reporting line. If such charges are permitted under any circumstance, please provide the applicable policy language, a description of the charges, and the number of facilities where this practice has occurred.

Response: Detainees may directly contact the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Professional Responsibility Intake Center, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General, the Detention Reporting and Information Line, and various other external entities to report complaints of alleged sexual abuse or assault without limits to the number of calls. All calls to these reporting lines, which receive a variety of complaints, including those related to sexual abuse and assault, are free of charge. Detainees are continuously provided this information via the ICE Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness Poster, the ICE Sexual Abuse and Assault Informational Pamphlet, and the ICE National Detainee Handbook.

¹ [https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title34/subtitle3/chapter303&edition=prelim#:/~text=The%20Prison%20Rape%20Elimination%20Act%20of%202003%20\(PREA\)%20was%20enacted,30301\(1\)%20%5D](https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title34/subtitle3/chapter303&edition=prelim#:/~text=The%20Prison%20Rape%20Elimination%20Act%20of%202003%20(PREA)%20was%20enacted,30301(1)%20%5D). U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement owned and contracted facilities are generally governed by 6 C.F.R. 115, *Standards to Prevent, Detect, and Respond to Sexual Abuse and Assault in Confinement Facilities* (DHS PREA), multiple ICE national detention standards, and other ICE specific directives and policies. ICE does not dictate PREA compliance at non-Department of Homeland Security facilities, which would generally be governed by 28 C.F.R. 115, *National Standards to prevent, Detect and Respond to Prison Rape* (DOJ PREA).

Language assistance or disability accommodations are made available to all detainees as needed. In addition, facilities have other no-cost reporting options available to detainees, including the ability to report an allegation to any staff member.

Question: Are ICE detainees guaranteed the ability to place calls to PREA-required reporting hotlines in private, in a private enclosed space without visual or auditory monitoring by staff or other detainees? If not, how many facilities lack such privacy protections, and what guidance governs the location and monitoring of phones used for PREA-related reporting?

Response: ICE recognizes the sensitivity of these situations and facilities ensure detainees can conduct private, anonymous, and free of charge calls to the Detention Reporting and Information Line, Office of Professional Responsibility, and Office of Inspector General, while otherwise explicitly notifying detainees when telephonic monitoring is in use.

The DHS Prison Rape Elimination Act Standards require ICE to provide detainees “multiple ways to privately report sexual abuse, retaliation for reporting sexual abuse, or staff neglect or violations of responsibilities that may have contributed to such incidents.” ICE is dedicated to enforcing the agency’s zero-tolerance policy regarding sexual abuse and assault within detention facilities and recognizes the importance of allowing complaints to remain anonymous and confidential, if desired, when being reported. ICE oversees a network of facilities with various structural layouts; however, it is the intention of the Agency to ensure that ICE detainees have private, unmonitored methods to report complaints. Detainee legal calls and calls to the Office of Professional Responsibility Intake Center, Office of Inspector General, and the Detention Reporting and Information Line are unmonitored.

Moreover, in accordance with ICE detention standards, detainees are notified when other calls are monitored. ICE detention facilities must have a written policy regarding monitoring of detainee phone calls. If phone calls are monitored, the facility must:

- (1) provide a recorded message on the phone system stating that calls are subject to monitoring;
- (2) inform detainees of monitoring in a handbook upon their admission to the facility;
- (3) place a notice at each monitored telephone stating that “detainee calls are subject to monitoring” along with directions on how to request an unmonitored phone call to a court or legal entity.

ICE’s Performance-Based National Detention Standards (Performance-Based National Detention Standards 2011 (rev.2016)) 5.6 and National Detention Standards (National Detention Standards 2019) 5.4, *Telephone Access*, both address telephone access for detainees.

Prison Rape Elimination Act Standards require that any detainee reporting sexual abuse or assault can remain anonymous upon request. Additionally, in most facilities, ICE provides detainees with Talton tablets, which allows them to place phone calls and submit secure messages, to include reporting instances of sexual abuse and assault, without any form of auditory monitoring. Alternatively, detainees can also submit a private written request,

complaint, or allegation to the facility or ICE officers. The detainee can simply request an envelope and seal the written message. The staff will not read or change the message, and it will be delivered to the individual, office, or mailbox as indicated on the envelope. ICE also accepts third party reports, and facilities are required to establish a method to receive third-party reports in its facilities and inform the public on how to report sexual abuse on behalf of a detainee.

Question: Are calls made by detainees to PREA-related hotlines recorded or monitored in any way? If so, what safeguards are in place to ensure that detainee communications are treated as confidential and compliant with PREA standards?

Response: As stated above, detainee calls to report complaints of sexual abuse or assault to hotlines such as Office of Inspector General, Office of Professional Responsibility, and the Detention Reporting and Information Line, are not monitored. As stated in ICE Performance-Based National Detention Standards 2011 and National Detention Standards 2019, monitoring of other calls may occur for the purpose of ensuring facility and detainee security and safety. If calls made by a detainee are to be monitored, the facility must include a recorded message notifying the detainee of the monitoring. Detainees are also provided a facility detainee handbook upon admission at intake, and there is a notice at each monitored telephone stating that calls are subject to monitoring and the procedure for obtaining an unmonitored call to a court or to legal representation in English and Spanish.

Any report of sexual assault or sexual abuse is maintained confidentially as required by the DHS Prison Rape Elimination Act Standards and ICE detention standards. A Prison Rape Elimination Act report is anonymous and confidential, as information is only shared on a need-to-know-basis. Additionally, ICE accepts Prison Rape Elimination Act reports that do not include the name of the reporter, alleged victim, or alleged perpetrator.

Question: What training does ICE require for facility staff and contractors on recognizing, reporting, and responding to sexual abuse allegations?² Please detail the required content, frequency, and whether the training is adapted for privately managed detention facilities or different staff roles (e.g., medical staff, case managers, security personnel).

Response: The DHS Prison Rape Elimination Act Standards contain training requirements for facility staff, contractors, and volunteers within 6 Code of Federal Regulations §115.31, Staff training; §115.32, Other training; §115.34, Specialized training: Investigations; and §115.35, Specialized training: Medical and mental health care. Through detention facility contracts, ICE obligates service providers (facilities) to provide training to their respective personnel in accordance with the DHS Prison Rape Elimination Act Standards. The training includes zero tolerance policies; detainee rights; prohibited and illegal sexual behavior; signs of sexual abuse; methods of preventing and responding to occurrences; inappropriate relationships with detainees; communicating effectively and professionally with detainees; procedures for

² [https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title34/subtitle3/chapter303&edition=prelim#~:text=The%20Prison%20Rape%20Elimination%20Act%20of%202003%20\(PREA\)%20was%20enacted,30301\(1\)%20%5D](https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title34/subtitle3/chapter303&edition=prelim#~:text=The%20Prison%20Rape%20Elimination%20Act%20of%202003%20(PREA)%20was%20enacted,30301(1)%20%5D)

reporting knowledge or suspicion of sexual abuse; confidentiality; training for all staff, refresher training every two years; and documentation of training.

2. Standards for Legal Access and Detainee Resources

To: Acting Director Todd Lyons

Background: In the wake of the Department of Justice's decision to cut funding for the Executive Office for Immigration Review—one of the few federally supported legal access tools for individuals in removal proceedings—the burden to ensure access to counsel within ICE facilities has only grown. Clarity on what standards ICE enforces to ensure uniform legal access across all facilities, and what infrastructure is in place to support this access is still needed.

Question: What written policies or contractual requirements does ICE currently have in place to ensure attorney access at all detention facilities, including standards for in-person visits, virtual meetings, and legal phone calls? Please specify whether these policies guarantee confidential attorney-client communications, and describe any facility-level limitations, such as bandwidth constraints or space availability, that impact access.

Response: Detainees have access to legal counsel in accordance with ICE detention standards, such as National Detention Standards 2019, Performance-Based National Detention Standards 2011 (revised 2016), the 2025 National Detention Standards, as well the Non-Dedicated Intergovernmental Detention Standards among others; one set is made applicable and incorporated in every contract for detention services. These detention standards require that detainees have: (1) confidential contact with attorneys and their authorized representatives in person, on the telephone, and through correspondence; and (2) access to law libraries/legal materials, information, and resources that inform their immigration court case. ICE detention standards are available to the public on ICE's public facing website at <https://www.ice.gov/detain/detention-management>.

Question: Do spaces at detention facilities provided for detainees' legal representation to meet with clients have reliable internet access for use while at the facility?

Response: To maintain the safety and security of detention facilities, internet access for or around detainees is limited and local individual detention facility rules govern internet access for legal representatives during visits.

ICE notes it actively seeks to improve technology and internet connectivity at ICE detention facilities. ICE looks forward to continuing to work with Congress to support internet connectivity more systemically across ICE facilities, focusing on facilities with a higher average daily population and/or contractual capacity.

Question: What minimum standards does ICE require for law libraries in detention facilities, including the availability of up-to-date legal materials, digital access, and multilingual content? Please describe ICE's oversight mechanisms to ensure compliance, including how often

facilities are audited, and what enforcement actions are taken when deficiencies are identified.

Response: ICE detention standards, incorporated into every ICE detention services contract, require detainees to have meaningful access to a law library, including comprehensive legal materials and equipment. ICE provides the LexisNexis Electronic Law Library at every over-72-hour facility and provides a step-by-step guide about how to navigate the Law Library and locate self-help legal resources and other detention-related information. Per the ICE detention standards, detainees in ICE detention facilities have access to law libraries for at least five hours per week. These libraries often contain comprehensive legal materials and are equipped with computers, printers and photocopiers. Detainees may submit written requests for legal material not available in the law library.

To help ensure ICE's adherence to the ICE detention standards and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on national origin (including language), ICE has taken several steps to help ensure limited English proficient detainees have meaningful access to the law library. For example, ICE:

- Coordinated with the vendor, LexisNexis, so the Law Library, which is available to limited English proficient detainees through facility law library computers, displays 13 'iSpeak' language tracks. The language tracks make it easier for detainees to find, in one location, Legal Orientation Program materials, the ICE National Detainee Handbook, the American Bar Association Know Your Rights Handbook, and other available resources translated into the selected language.
- Disseminated a "How to Find Resources in My Language" flyer, which is translated into 13 languages other than English, to facility law libraries to help detainees navigate the LexisNexis Electronic Hard Drive and locate these self-help legal resources in their language.
- Disseminated the Law Library Resource Manual to assist facility Law Library Coordinators and other facility staff to recognize what resources and tools are available from ICE and within the Law Library, as well as how to utilize and share best practices.
- Programmed into the Detainee Telephone Service pro bono platform, which is accessible to all detainees, the American Bar Association Legal Orientation Program Information Line as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Asylum line; these free hotlines provide abridged Legal Orientation Program and legal services and resources, and hotline staff have access to professional language line interpreters.
- Distributed to detention facilities a video developed by the American Bar Association entitled "Know Your Rights" in English, Spanish, and French.

To ensure consistent conditions of confinement across the ICE detention facility network, ICE's Detention Oversight Unit ensures detainees in ICE custody reside in safe, secure, and humane environments and under appropriate conditions of confinement through daily on-site compliance reviews. This is accomplished by Detention Service Managers and Detention Standards Compliance Officers who provide "on the spot" resolutions of facility issues and concerns, irregular and unscheduled inspection checks, and facilitate corrective action in close

collaboration with field officers and facility staff. ICE also relies on an aggressive inspections program conducted by the Office of Detention Oversight; Congress requires that ICE detention facilities comply with the relevant detention standard.

3. Contractor Identification and Qualifications

To: Acting Director Todd Lyons

The proliferation of contracted personnel across ICE operations introduces accountability challenges. Clarity is needed on the extent to which detainees, other law enforcement agencies, and the public are informed when they are interacting with DHS personnel or contractors, and whether such personnel possess the requisite training and credentials to engage in sensitive detention and medical functions.³

Question: Are ICE contractors who interact with detainees required to disclose that they are not federal officers? If so, are they required to disclose this verbally, through specific uniforms, or via visible identification badges?

Response: Upon arrival at a detention facility, all detainees are provided with the ICE National Detainee Handbook, which outlines important information about their rights and general facility procedures. The handbook advises detainees that they are being housed in a detention facility operated by or under contract with ICE. In addition, officers at contract detention facilities typically wear uniforms that clearly identify them as employees of the facility, helping to distinguish them from ICE personnel.

Question: What credentialing or training requirements does ICE currently impose on contractors who process, transport, or oversee detainees? Please clarify whether these standards vary by role or contract type.

Response: Contractors who oversee aliens in ICE custody are required to adhere to the applicable set of ICE detention standards specific to the facility in which they operate, such as the Performance-Based National Detention Standards 2011 (revised 2016) or National Detention Standards 2019. The applicable version of the detention standards will be determined during the negotiations of the contract and included in the final agreement. Compliance with these standards is critical to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of detainees. As part of this responsibility, contract staff must complete all training as required in their statement of work with ICE, which includes specific hours of instruction in subject areas related to the ICE detention standards. Additionally, mandatory trainings may include suicide prevention and intervention, use of force, medical response protocols, emergency evacuation procedure and proper documentation, and reporting practices. These trainings ensure contract personnel are equipped to maintain a safe and secure detention environment.

³ <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/reported-doj-orders-federally-funded-legal-service-providers-to-stop-work-on-the-legal-orientation-program-immigration-court-helpdesk-and-counsel-for-children-initiative/#/tab-policy-documents>

4. Contractor Training and Mandatory Reporting Protocols

To: Acting Director Todd Lyons

Contractors performing mission-critical functions within ICE detention facilities—particularly in healthcare, case management, and custodial operations—frequently interact with vulnerable individuals who may disclose urgent safety, asylum, or medical concerns that would require escalation if reported to DHS employees. A clear explanation is still needed regarding whether these contractors are legally or contractually required to document and escalate such disclosures, and what training ICE mandates to ensure they uphold the agency’s statutory and humanitarian obligations.

Question: Are contractors, including medical staff and processing personnel, required to report concerns raised by detainees that would be required to be reported if reported to ICE employees—such as sexual assault, disclosures of fear about returning to their country of origin, or other concerns?

Response: Yes, regardless of whether detention facilities are owned and operated by ICE, a state or local entity, or a contractor, each detention facility adheres to ICE national detention standards. ICE detention standards include clear and mandatory reporting requirements when detainees raise concerns about sexual assault, fear of return to their country of origin, or other safety and well-being issues. These requirements are detailed in the 2011 Performance-Based National Detention Standards (revised 2016) and the 2019 National Detention Standards. Additionally, DHS regulation, *Standards to Prevent, Detect, and Respond to Sexual Abuse and Assault in Confinement Facilities*, require staff, contractors, and volunteers to immediately report any knowledge, suspicion, or information regarding incidents of sexual abuse and assault occurring in a facility; retaliation against detainees or staff who reported or participated in an investigation about such an incident; and any staff neglect or violation of responsibilities that may have contributed to an incident or retaliation allegations to management or third-party reporting mechanisms whereby remaining anonymous. Staff are required to accept reports made verbally, in writing, anonymously, and from third parties and to promptly document any verbal reports.

Additionally, contracted medical staff working in ICE facilities are subject to ICE Health Service Corps Directive 01-25, *Significant Event Notification and Significant Medical Case Reporting* (October 4, 2023). Contracted medical staff are required to report any event defined in the policy up the chain of leadership at the facility in which they are working.

Question: What training does ICE currently require for contractors working in detention facilities, including those in healthcare, migrant processing, and security roles? Please describe the content, frequency, and oversight of this training.

Response: All contractors working in facilities housing ICE detainees receive initial and ongoing training to ensure competency in their duties. This includes understanding ICE detention standards, facility policies, and procedures. The training should be appropriate to the contractor’s assignment and level of contact with detainees. ICE requires its contractors

to complete a specific number of hours of instruction in various subjects based on position type. Additionally, DHS regulation, *Standards to Prevent, Detect, and Respond to Sexual Abuse and Assault in Confinement Facilities*, and ICE policy require contractors receive initial and regular refresher *Prison Rape Elimination Act* training. Facilities are required to maintain documentation verifying that contractors have completed the necessary training and refresher training as required. The ICE Office of Detention Oversight, in accordance with congressional mandate, conducts inspections of all ICE detention facilities to ensure compliance with applicable ICE national detention standards.

Contracted medical staff are required to complete mandatory annual training. Two specific trainings focus on the directive: 1) ICE Health Service Corps Risk Management: Safety Culture and Incident Reporting; and 2) ICE Health Service Corps Prison Rape Elimination Act and Sexual Abuse and Assault Prevention Intervention.

Additionally, the ICE Health Service Corps Medical Education and Development Unit manages training plans, administration, and reporting of training by ICE Health Service Corps contractors. The Medical Education and Development Unit reports failure to complete training by the annual due date to facility leadership. Facility leadership in turn is responsible for notifying the corresponding Contracting Officer Representative for contract action, if warranted.

5. Enforcement Transparency and Officer Identification Standards

To: Acting Director Todd Lyons

Background: The public must be able to distinguish and identify armed federal officers conducting immigration enforcement actions. Clarity is needed on how the ICE balances officer safety with the public's right to transparency.

Question: Please provide the committee with copies of all Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, and Enforcement and Removal Operations policy related to officer identification, uniform markings, and the use of face coverings or masks during enforcement operations.

Response: ICE does not have a policy governing face masks or coverings, and such use is at the discretion of each law enforcement officer. ICE law enforcement officers are not prohibited from using face coverings during operations to ensure their safety, especially in situations where there is a heightened risk of retaliation—a scenario which has become increasingly more common. Due to intensifying doxxing and threats to the safety of federal agents and their families, face coverings are reasonable protection.

Question: Please provide the full text of any internal ICE policies governing officer identification and concealment practices during enforcement actions.

Response: Regarding identification, ICE officers may initially identify themselves as “police” during encounters, as it is a universally recognized term for law enforcement, and our personnel

routinely interact with individuals from around the world who speak languages other than English. The law enforcement environment can be dangerous, and the ability to immediately identify oneself as law enforcement can be a critical safety measure. ICE officers typically wear clothing with law enforcement markings, such as “POLICE” or “ICE,” to ensure they are easily recognizable as law enforcement personnel.

6. Congressional Representation in ICE Facilities

To: Acting Director Todd Lyons

Background: Members of Congress frequently hear from constituents—particularly U.S. citizens with family members in ICE detention—who are unaware of how to contact their elected representatives or what congressional support may be available to them during immigration enforcement proceedings. Transparency and access to congressional offices are foundational to oversight and accountability.

Question: Please describe ICE’s current policies and procedures governing what information on their congressional representation is posted or distributed in detention facility visitor areas for the public. Are there current federal standards or contractual requirements addressing the availability of congressional office contact information?

Response: ICE requires a number of postings in detention facilities, including sexual abuse and assault prevention, the DHS Office of Inspector General Hotline, language services, and legal orientation. Aliens in ICE detention are able to contact members of Congress via telephone or mail.

Question: Members of Congress have reported delays in returns of privacy release forms after casework has been initiated. What oversight mechanisms are in place to ensure that facilities are not obstructing or delaying constituent engagement with congressional offices?

Response: ICE contract detention facilities are required to ensure that outgoing mail is promptly delivered in accordance with established standards. Specifically, the 2019 National Detention Standards mandate prompt delivery to the postal service. Additionally, the 2011 Performance-Based National Detention Standard (revised 2016) requires delivery within 24 hours. To ensure adherence with these standards, the ICE Office of Detention Oversight conducts inspections of ICE detention facilities, in compliance with its congressional mandate, ensuring the procedures and requirements of detention standards are being met.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2025.

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

WITNESS

ADMIRAL KEVIN LUNDAY, ACTING COMMANDANT, THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Mr. AMODEI. The Subcommittee on Homeland Security will come to order.

I am pleased to be joined by the subcommittee's distinguished ranking member, the gentlelady from Illinois, Ms. Underwood.

Welcome, Admiral Lunday. Thank you for being here.

While we await the details of the full fiscal year 2026 budget request, the focus of this hearing will be on the Coast Guard's priorities, a deeper dive into the current state of its acquisition programs, and the Coast Guard's strategies to expand its presence in the Arctic and counter China in the Indo-Pacific.

We will begin with the ranking member's opening statement.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And welcome, Admiral Lunday. Thank you for joining us today.

As I have said repeatedly over the last 2 weeks, it is challenging to have budget hearings without a budget request from this administration. It puts us in a difficult position, and, Admiral Lunday, it puts you in a difficult position as well.

So let me start by saying that my frustration and the frustration from my side of the aisle is not with you, Admiral, nor is it with the brave men and women of the Coast Guard who serve every day as Armed Forces, first responders, law enforcement officers, healthcare providers, intelligence officers, environmental engineers, navigation equipment maintainers, cybersecurity specialists, and so much more. The Coast Guard does it all, and we are so thankful that they do.

We see that every day in Illinois when nearly 200 Coasties promote trade and protect waterway safety in Lake Michigan and the Illinois River Watershed. And we see it in your creative approach to problem-solving, like the Coast Guard's groundbreaking 2022 decision to begin training medical providers, which, as a nurse, is something that I am excited to continue to support and help expand.

Congress and this subcommittee are here to be your partners in these efforts. Our job is to ensure that the Coast Guard has the resources it needs to do all 11 of its statutory missions, including sav-

ing lives, stopping drug flow, and keeping our waterways open to commerce.

But we cannot be good partners without good information, and we are not getting good information from this administration's Department of Homeland Security. At a time when the Coast Guard is in the middle of a massive fleet recapitalization—and you are staring down some very big acquisition decisions—that information flow is more important than ever.

Unfortunately, there are several areas where the Coast Guard is falling short. The Coast Guard was the last of the DHS components to provide Congress with its legally required spending plan for fiscal year 2025, missing the deadline by 9 days. When it showed up, it included plans for a new \$50 million corporate jet for the Department that had never been requested or even mentioned before. The administration has failed to send up a fiscal year 2026 budget, and we are hearing rumors that it may not do so until next month. The Coast Guard's rumored Force Design 2028 plan has yet to see the light of day, and we did not receive your testimony until 8 p.m. last night.

That is an information flow problem, and it is not sustainable. Consistent, detailed communication is critical to achieving our shared goals this Congress, and that is what we need from the Coast Guard moving forward.

Lastly, while we discuss your work to combat external threats, we cannot overlook threats within the Coast Guard itself. Operation Fouled Anchor exposed serious failures in addressing misconduct, and we have a responsibility to ensure that survivors receive the support that they deserve, perpetrators are held accountable, and the culture within the Coast Guard reflects the highest standards of integrity and professionalism.

I very much appreciate your commitment in our meeting yesterday to providing a full briefing on the current status of this issue and the steps the Coast Guard has taken to improve its sexual assault prevention work and support survivors.

Thank you again, Admiral, for your service, and I look forward to working closely with you and my colleagues to ensure the Coast Guard has the resources it needs to succeed.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you, Madam Ranking Member.

As part of my respect for your time and the fact that I was late, and since I still haven't gotten a request for anybody on this committee for me to do an opening statement on anybody's budget, I am going to yield back my opening statement time.

And I also want to thank you; for a fellow on this committee hooked me up with my phone cover which, by the way, if there is anybody else on the committee that has one of these for their phone cover—

Ms. UNDERWOOD. No.

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. Please go on the record now.

Okay. We will move right along.

Admiral, you are recognized for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL KEVIN LUNDAY

Admiral LUNDAY. Good afternoon, Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Underwood, distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today.

Chairman, I ask that my written testimony be entered into the record.

Mr. AMODEI. Without objection, so ordered.

Admiral LUNDAY. Thank you for your enduring support of the Coast Guard and of our servicemen and -women and their families. Our people who volunteer to serve, who operate in a dangerous and unforgiving maritime environment to protect the American people, are extraordinary. They make the U.S. Coast Guard the best in the world.

Today is a pivotal moment for our service, a time of both profound change and challenge and unprecedented opportunity. Our Nation faces increasingly complex and dangerous threats to the security and prosperity of Americans, and the American people need a strong and capable Coast Guard now more than ever. Under the leadership of President Trump and Secretary Noem, the Coast Guard is making America more secure.

On January 21, I directed our operational commanders to immediately increase Coast Guard presence and operations along the U.S. border and maritime approaches, starting with the southern border where the President had declared a national emergency just the day before. We surged forces, tripling the number of forward-deployed aircraft, ships, boats, and teams to control, secure, and defend the southern border.

The Coast Guard also increased efforts to secure and defend our ports and waterways, which are vital to U.S. economic prosperity and strategic mobility, and we did that both in the physical domain and in cyberspace.

And the Coast Guard continues other operations to secure our northern border and the border and approaches around Alaska, Hawaii, our three U.S. territories in the Pacific, and our two U.S. territories in the Caribbean. Our highest priority is achieving full operational control of the border, and that includes our ports and waterways.

As the Coast Guard has done throughout our history, we adjusted our operational posture to focus on the top needs and priorities while continuing to conduct our missions with excellence.

Every day, our Coast Guard men and women, with our ships, aircraft, boats, and technology, are delivering results for the American people. We are deterring and interdicting illegal migration by sea. In the last 4 months alone, we have prevented over 860 aliens from illegally reaching the U.S. by sea and deterred thousands more. We continue to combat foreign terrorist organizations, including cartels and transnational criminal organizations, by interdicting smugglers and seizing bulk cocaine and other drugs at sea.

We have already surpassed our entire fiscal year 2024 cocaine interdiction numbers, and we seized, so far this year, 133 metric tons of cocaine and marijuana. Principally, cocaine. And I have set as a top operational priority combatting illicit fentanyl shipments in commercial maritime shipping.

However, despite the mission's success and great work of our people, the Coast Guard is in a severe readiness crisis that has been decades in the making. Today, our Coast Guard is less ready than at any other time since the end of World War II 80 years ago. This is not sustainable. And now is the time for fundamental change, and we need your support now more than ever.

With President Trump's direction to rebuild the military and secure our borders, and Secretary Noem, under her leadership, the Coast Guard will implement Force Design 2028, a bold blueprint to renew our service. As Secretary Noem testified here last week, with Force Design 2028, we will transform the Coast Guard into a more agile, capable, and responsive force.

Together, we must act now through this blueprint, along with increased capital investments and reconciliation and in a sustained, top-line growth in our annual appropriation to restore Coast Guard readiness today and prepare us for the future.

As we navigate through this time of transformation, I have certain hope for the future of our Coast Guard.

No matter the challenges ahead, if there is one thing our distinguished service history in both peace and in war tell us, it is this: With a ready Coast Guard crew, and the strong support of the American people, there is nothing we can't accomplish.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]

U. S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

2703 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, DC 20593-7000
Staff Symbol: CCG
Phone: (202) 372-4411

**TESTIMONY OF
ADMIRAL KEVIN E. LUNDAY
ACTING COMMANDANT, U.S. COAST GUARD**

**ON
“POLICY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ADMINISTRATION PRIORITIES”**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY**

MAY 14, 2025

Introduction

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Underwood, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify. I am grateful for your continuing support of the United States Coast Guard. It is my privilege to appear before you today to discuss the Service’s accomplishments and priorities.

The Coast Guard is part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) team protecting America and one of the six military services and part of the joint force defending it. We maintain a persistent presence in the maritime domain—from coastal ports and inland waters to the high seas—to control, secure, and defend the U.S. border and maritime approaches from maritime threats; facilitate the flow of safe and secure commerce; respond to maritime disasters; and save lives. As a maritime Nation, America’s economic prosperity and national security are inextricably linked to the sea and our ports and inland waterways. The Coast Guard is a vital instrument of national power to ensure our Nation’s maritime dominance.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, our men and women conducted maritime interdiction operations, intercepting over 5,200 aliens and seizing more than 275,000 pounds of illicit drugs. These narcotics, valued at approximately \$3.3 billion, were prevented from reaching U.S. shores. In U.S. ports, an integral part of the border and vital to the American economy, the Coast Guard ensured the safe and secure movement of over 1.6 billion tons of goods critical to U.S. national security and economic prosperity. Our crews maintained nearly 45,000 navigational aids across the Marine Transportation System (MTS), conducted more than 9,600 patrols to protect maritime critical infrastructure, and safeguarded 4.4 million square miles of Exclusive Economic Zone, boarding 180 foreign vessels to suppress illegal fishing activities. We also deployed the Nation’s only two polar icebreakers – cutters *Polar Star* and *Healy* – to assure U.S. access to the Polar regions, protect U.S. sovereignty, and advance geopolitical, security, and economic interests. Coast Guard cutters and deployable specialized forces teams interdicted smuggling vessels in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman carrying 170 tons of pre-cursor explosive material and, in lock step with our Department of Defense (DoD) partners, deterred malign activity against commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and across the region. Your Coast Guard saved over 4,800 lives, assisted nearly 22,000 people in distress, and responded to six catastrophic weather events.

In January of this year, under the leadership of Secretary Noem, I directed our operational commanders to immediately increase Coast Guard presence along the U.S. border and maritime approaches, starting with the southern border where the President has declared a national emergency. We surged forces, tripling the number of forward-deployed air and surface assets in that area. In the last four months alone, the Service interdicted or deterred over 860 aliens from reaching the U.S. by sea in the coastal and offshore approaches between the U.S. and Mexico in the Pacific Ocean and Gulf of America, as well as along the southeast border and approaches in the Caribbean. Concurrently, the Service exceeded its entire FY 2024 cocaine maritime interdiction numbers by mid-February of this year. By surging operational forces to the region and in close coordination with the DoD, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and other interagency partners, the Coast Guard is seeking total operational control of the U.S. southern border. In addition to supporting the national emergency at the U.S. southern border, the Coast Guard moved to control, secure, and defend our ports and waterways in both the physical and cyber domains.

Our MTS powers the national economy, ensures strategic mobility, and is part of our U.S. border. The Coast Guard also continues operations to control, secure, and defend the U.S. northern border, including on the Great Lakes, and the U.S. border and maritime approaches surrounding Alaska, Hawaii, and the U.S. territories in the Pacific and Caribbean. Our highest priority remains full operational control of the U.S. borders and maritime approaches, including U.S. ports and waterways in the physical domain and cyberspace, and we are delivering results for the American people. Critically, the Coast Guard's work also supports the Trump Administration's Drug Policy Priorities, released on April 1 of this year, including Priority 2: Secure the Global Supply Chain Against Drug Trafficking, which focuses on decreasing the global movement of illicit drugs through all shipping modalities; and Priority 3: Stop the Flow of Drugs Across Our Borders and into Our Communities, which aims to decrease the domestic availability of illicit drugs and save American lives.

The U.S. Coast Guard is facing a severe readiness crisis due to decades of underinvestment. Tasked with defending the Nation's maritime borders, countering threats like illegal migration and drug trafficking, safeguarding our ports and waterways, responding to maritime disasters, and saving lives, the Service is now stretched thin, with significant workforce shortages and aging, underfunded assets and infrastructure nearing collapse. The Coast Guard's current organizational structure and reactive posture are no longer adequate to meet current and emerging challenges. To restore its strength and fulfill its mission, the Coast Guard must undergo a fundamental transformation—not just evolve but revolutionize how it operates. With President Trump's directive to rebuild the military and secure U.S. borders, the Coast Guard will implement Force Design 2028, a bold blueprint to grow its military force, drive urgent innovation, modernize its capabilities, and ensure it remains a proactive, resilient, and dominant maritime force for the future.

Additionally, the Coast Guard will leverage President Trump's Executive Order on Restoring America's Maritime Dominance to encourage the growth of the domestic maritime industry through initiatives that will facilitate the expansion of U.S. operators' fleets, foster the growth of emerging maritime technologies, and ease the entry of American workers into the maritime industry. To this end, the Coast Guard has already taken steps to reduce barriers to entry for vessels into the U.S.-flag fleet through expanding the application of Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular (NVIC) 01-13 to a broader group of vessels seeking to flag into the United States. The Coast Guard will continue to play a major role in rebuilding the domestic maritime industry.

As we await delivery of the full FY 2026 President's Budget and look toward the opportunity of substantial organizational investments via the FY 2025 budget reconciliation process, we recognize the unprecedented support from across government to address this readiness crisis and invest in the future of the Coast Guard. These parallel and complementary investments would fundamentally renew the Service, enabling the Coast Guard to modernize its assets by completing essential acquisition programs.

We must eliminate backlogs in maintenance for our cutters, boats, aircraft, and shore infrastructure, returning our assets to peak operational readiness to deliver results and guarantee the safety of our crews. We must invest in new assets across our surface, aviation, shore, and C5I programs and modernize existing platforms with advanced enabling technologies. We must also redouble efforts to recruit and retain the highly skilled workforce necessary for our complex missions.

Cutter Fleet

The Service's top surface acquisition priority remains the Polar Security Cutter (PSC) and expanding the icebreaking fleet to meet the President's direction. Continuing to invest in heavy polar icebreakers is vital to counter foreign malign influence and protect America's sovereign interests in the polar regions. We recently received permission to enter full production of the first PSC as the functional design maturity surpassed 95%.

Since the founding of the Revenue Cutter Service in 1790, our missions have revolved around executing border security and defense missions at sea, and that operational mainstay has not changed. To continue to execute those missions in the future, the Offshore Patrol Cutter (OPC) remains one of the Coast Guard's top acquisition priorities, and is absolutely vital to replace and enhance the capability provided by our legacy fleet of 210-foot and 270-foot Medium Endurance Cutters (MEC), which first entered service in the 1960s and 1980s, respectively.

While PSC and OPC are priorities, we cannot ignore our needs across the full surface fleet. Some of our inland tenders have been in service since the 1940s, maintaining both fixed and floating aids to navigation for the MTS – the 25,000 miles of rivers and navigable channels that serve as the lifeblood of our economy. The Waterways Commerce Cutters (WCC) will replace our legacy inland tender fleet and will feature modern designs for propulsion and crew habitability to enable men and women to serve America's heartland, where they help ensure that food, energy, consumer goods, and raw materials continue to flow safely and securely through our navigable waterways despite constantly changing conditions and water levels.

Aviation Fleet

Coast Guard aviation is more essential than ever to guarantee the territorial integrity of the United States by controlling the Nation's border and maritime approaches. The recent termination of the C-27J missionization program and stalled growth in our HC-130J program place our readiness to conduct various missions in jeopardy, including long range surveillance, disaster response, and border security operations. For our rotary wing fleet, it is imperative that we continue and accelerate transition of air stations from the short-range MH-65E to the medium-range MH-60 to ensure sustainability and increase our capability to serve our national priorities. Additionally, the Service stands ready to lead counter unmanned aerial systems (UAS) operations in the maritime domain, providing protection to critical infrastructure and Coast Guard assets.

Shore Infrastructure

Coast Guard facilities must be resilient to meet mission demands and serve as sound investments for the future. Based on the nature of our missions, most Coast Guard facilities are in areas prone to hurricanes, flooding, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. The Nation's reliance on the Coast Guard as a first responder after such disasters underscores the importance of our facilities being resilient to disasters and ready for operations. Budgetary constraints often force the Coast Guard to defer or scale needed shore infrastructure recapitalization, placing that strain on our front-line personnel who find ways to operate with what we can provide. We should be updating and where possible replacing legacy military housing and support facilities, modernizing shore facilities to accept new assets, and developing robust training infrastructure to prepare our workforce for their dangerous missions. Despite the best efforts of our engineers, the Service carries substantial backlogs for both the recapitalization of infrastructure and shore asset maintenance. While we are making headway on recapitalizing our cutters and aircraft, that progress requires making tough annual trade-offs that continue to impact our shore infrastructure needs, leading to increasing safety and habitability concerns.

Cybersecurity

The Coast Guard has a unique role to protect and defend the U.S. MTS in cyberspace, as well as the physical domain as a co-Sector Risk Management Agency, Intelligence Community member, and member of the Armed Forces. Maritime cybersecurity is a critical element of our national and economic security. Not only does maritime cybersecurity facilitate the flow of trillions of dollars of commerce, it also ensures strategic mobility to supply our warfighters abroad. Our cybersecurity forces are made up of Cyber Protection Teams and a Cyber Mission Team that we use to defend our Nation. We must grow our investment in the people and technology needed to ensure the Coast Guard's ability to secure and defend cyberspace.

Conclusion

Our commitments to control, secure, and defend the Nation's borders and maritime approaches, grow every day; demand for the Service has never been higher. The investments we make now will not only address immediate readiness concerns but will also rebuild a stronger, more capable and resilient Coast Guard for decades to come. Since 1790, the American people have depended on our missions and the unique value the Coast Guard provides to assure our national security and economic prosperity. If there is one thing our distinguished Service history in both peace and in war shows, it is this: with a ready Coast Guard crew there is nothing we cannot accomplish. I have certain hope for the future of our Service. We must act now to ensure the Coast Guard receives the resources necessary to fulfill our vital missions and protect the American people. Thank you for your enduring support. *Semper Paratus.*

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you, Admiral.

I am going to defer my questions until later in the hearing, so the chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Illinois for her questions. The floor is yours.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you.

Admiral, thank you for being here today. We know the Coast Guard does an incredible job with what you have but also remains chronically underresourced. The Coast Guard does lifesaving work to respond to maritime disasters, combat the flow of illegal drugs, counter China, and prevent cyber attacks. I strongly support large increases to your budget, probably even larger than you have requested in some areas. But I am concerned that this administration's political goals are shifting those limited resources away from strategic theaters where bad actors are aggressively testing American resolve.

In your written testimony, you stated that the Coast Guard is, quote, surging operational forces to the U.S. Mexico border and the Gulf of Mexico. So my question for you is, where specifically are those forces and resources to support them coming from? What theaters and missions were they assigned to before this surge? How many deportation flights has the Coast Guard flown, and why is that the best use of the aviation assets?

Admiral LUNDAY. Ranking Member Underwood, thanks for your questions and your support.

So, to answer your question about the alien expulsion operation flights, to date, since 20 January, the Coast Guard has flown 157 of those flights in support of other Department of Homeland Security components for southern border security operations.

As to the other operations where we have surged assets to the southern border—and for us, the southern border also includes the border approaching Florida and our territories in the Caribbean. That is part of the southern border for us as well.

And so we took planned operations from some other areas, and in consultation—principally, supporting combatant commanders. I consulted with those combatant commanders and the Department of Defense and briefed the Secretary on my plans to temporarily change some of those planned deployments.

This type of decision is not unprecedented, and we make those tough tradeoffs all the time because there is an increasing demand for Coast Guard resources and always a limited number of cutters, boats, aircraft, and crews to provide them.

And so that is part of the risk decision that I make in consultation with our area commanders.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Have any personnel, vessels, air assets, or other resources been pulled from the Coast Guard's Arctic strategy to accommodate the southern border surge?

Admiral LUNDAY. No, Ranking Member Underwood, they have not.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. What about your Indo-Pacific mission? Did you reduce list capacity in the region in favor of more deportation flights here, and are we going to be slower in building our presence there as a result of this surge?

Admiral LUNDAY. Ranking Member Underwood, there were two operational deployments that I directed to be changed through that

process I described before. And I want to be specific about that. One was a planned patrol working for Indo-Pacific Command, one of our national security cutters. And I consulted with Admiral Paparo about that before making that change. But there has been no change in our permanent presence in the Indo-Pacific.

The other change in the Atlantic—you asked about the Arctic. We had the Cutter Calhoun, another national security cutter that was scheduled to support a port visit for a senior leader meeting of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum in Iceland, and we canceled that planned meeting. It wasn't an operational meeting. And so that was related to the Arctic. But I wanted to be specific and clear in my answer.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. And what about the Great Lakes, where the Coast Guard plays a critical role in commerce and safety for the community I represent? Has there been any change to the staffing plans for the Great Lakes region?

Admiral LUNDAY. There have not been changes to that staffing plan. Our presence in the Great Lakes remain as important as always, which includes our domestic icebreaking presence there.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Excellent. In your testimony, you also wrote that you are tripling the number of forward-deployed air and surface assets at the southern border and simultaneously seeking total operational control of the region. It is clear strategic tradeoffs are being made, and I am concerned about the impact on your other missions.

The Coast Guard desperately needs more funding to meet its mission, and the passage of a reconciliation bill is far from guaranteed at this time. And Coasties, like most Americans, are struggling with the rising costs of living. I speak frequently with young guardsmen and women who struggle to afford housing and access medical care, which is why I was horrified last Friday when we received a last-minute addition to your spend plan for fiscal 2025, a new \$50 million Gulfstream V for Secretary Noem's personal travel, coming from the Coast Guard budget. She already has a Gulfstream V, by the way. This is a new one.

And so, Admiral, I have just one question for you here. Have you received any outreach, requests, or any other communication from anyone above you at DHS or any political appointee in the Trump administration regarding a new plane for the Secretary?

Admiral LUNDAY. Ranking Member Underwood, so first of all, thank you for the support of the committee and the continuing resolution for 2025, and as part of that spend plan, to address the needs of our servicemembers and their families. We are able to provide the pay raise for military and civilian personnel, including a targeted pay raise for our junior enlisted personnel, which was essential.

You had asked about the military command and control aircraft. So, first of all, meeting the needs of our Coast Guard men and women that are doing frontline operations is my top operational priority, and it is a top operational priority of the Secretary. She has been clear about that to me, and I know she testified to that effect before the subcommittee last week.

The Coast Guard, like the other military services, operates two military long-range command and control aircraft. This is part of

our military operational fleet of aircraft. These are C-37 variants. The older one is a C-37 alpha variant. And like a lot of the rest of our operational aviation fleet and our cutters and our boats and our shore facilities, it is old and it is approaching obsolescence and the end of its service life. The avionics are increasingly obsolete. The communications are increasingly unreliable, and it is in need of recapitalization, like much of the rest of the fleet.

But this aircraft is necessary to provide the Secretary, the deputy secretary, me as the acting commandant, the acting vice, and our two area commanders with secure, reliable, on-demand communications and movement to go forward as our operating forces conducting the missions, and then come back here to Washington to make sure we can work together to get them what they need.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Mr. Chairman, my time is expired. I just want to note that I didn't hear the Admiral answer the question about whether he was directed to purchase this new Gulfstream V, and I just want to note that as I conclude my time.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. The chair recognizes Mr. Rutherford for 5 minutes for his questions.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member.

And, Admiral, thank you for being here today. I want to talk about—a little bit about the future of the Coast Guard's aviation, because as your responsibility grows to support not only maritime security but defense missions continue to increase and become ever more critical to our national security, I am concerned about the mission readiness of our fixed wing and rotary wing aviation fleets. It seems like there has been, prior to you, somewhat of a disjointed response to the aviation planning and that a comprehensive strategy would help ensure that there are no gaps in readiness. And one of the things that we actually included in the fiscal year 2023 Coast Guard reauthorization bill was a request for a study like that.

So three quick questions on the aviation issue, Admiral.

Does the Coast Guard have the aviation assets required to fill its operational missions today?

Number two, when should we or can we expect the aviation strategy called for in the 2023 Coast Guard reauthorization?

And then finally, while I understand the want to move to a single platform because of the commonality of training and maintenance and all of that, one of the things I worry about is, if all of these assets are being kind of handed down, a lot of them, I understand, are reaching end of life, and so that could create some gaps in the not too distant future. Could you talk about your openness to a mixed fleet, if that were necessary to pull that off? And I would like you to tell me how we can help you achieve whatever your new plan turns out to be.

Admiral LUNDAY. Thank you for the questions, Congressman, about the aviation fleet mix and where we are going.

We had an opportunity to come up and brief the committee staff on an initial readout of our aviation strategy going forward, following on for the requirement in the authorization act. But we have more work to do. And part of that is an ongoing analysis of

alternatives of what that fleet mix should be between—across our rotary wing, our helicopters, and also our fixed wing fleet.

And so that will also include—I see an increase in our long-range uncrewed or unmanned aerial systems. That is work we have been doing for years in a joint program office approach with Customs and Border Protection. And I see that as a key component going forward. But that will be borne out on the analysis of alternatives as we work to refine that aviation strategy.

So part of our challenge is that we have been operating airframes, particularly the helicopters, to the end of their service life. In some cases, like for our H-60 that is built by Sikorsky, well beyond what anyone else in the world operates, which is why we found ourselves in a difficult position late last year where, for those hulls that we had operated beyond 19,000 hours, Sikorsky communicated concerns that they did not have data to support that operation beyond that point. And so we had to ground those aircraft with high-time hours until we can go through and replace the key components that take them over that limit.

And that is just a symptom that, even though we can operate aircraft to that level, we should not be. We should be investing in new aircraft and recapitalizing those and then have an appropriate mix to meet not only the demands of today but the demands of the future.

Part of the Force Design 2028 effort that Secretary Noem has directed and discussed will be to look at what the Coast Guard's operating concepts are in the future and also what our force structure and force design is, including our aviation mix, and how that fits within the broader mix of assets across our ships, boats, aircraft, and shore facilities. And we look forward to working with the committee on those needs and the level of investment required to modernize the future fleet and get to that point.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you, Admiral. And I have got just 30 seconds left. But you kind of segued into my next question which deals with the unmanned systems. And one of the things that I would like is—can you talk about the resources you need to get that long endurance aerial unmanned program off the ground for something like an MQ-9 or some other system, and the importance that that plays in offsetting your needs in the current aviation fleet?

Admiral LUNDAY. Congressman, I look forward to working with you and the members of the subcommittee to provide greater detail on that information as we move forward on budget reconciliation, and we look forward to the release of the President's budget request for fiscal year 2026. But we have already done very strong work with CBP on the importance and the value of the long-range UAS. The MQ-9 is what we operate with CBP.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you. I see my time has expired. I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. AMODEI. Mrs. Hinson, the floor is yours for 5 minutes for questions.

Mrs. HINSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, Admiral. Again, thank you for coming to testify before our subcommittee.

The Coast Guard plays such an important role, as you have already touched on a number of topics, from interdiction and defense, just such a necessary line of helping to keep our country safe. And under President Trump's leadership, obviously we are seeing a renewed investment and renewed commitment to that promise to keep America safe.

I hear you talk about investment in a modernized fleet, expanded maritime enforcement capabilities. All of those things, I think, make Iowans feel good. Even though we are between two rivers, we like to know that our coasts are safe. But also, obviously, Iowa has a very significant Coast Guard presence, with a fleet that needs upgrading.

So that is going to be my line of questioning today because we are—Iowa, in Dubuque, is the homeport for the Cutter Wyaconda, which is 60 years old. So a nice, old ship celebrating its 60th anniversary at the end of this month. Absolutely vital in keeping the upper Mississippi navigable for us. But it comes down to supporting our farmers, our producers, being able to get things to market up and down the Mississippi River safely and efficiently.

So these legacy cutters have served our country well, but they are showing their age. And so we must, I believe, move quickly to replace them with more modern vessels that can keep up with today's demands.

So we know that Coast Guard has initial approval for this program. So do you agree that it is time to prioritize building these new cutters to make sure we can deploy them and get them into service without delay?

Admiral LUNDAY. Representative Hinson, it certainly is important. Most people think of the Coast Guard, certainly, along the coast or at sea, but we are just as present in America's heartland and our Great Lakes and in the inland rivers and waterways, including in your district. So we have a recapitalization program for those construction tenders and those river tenders that are so vital to keeping lifesaving commerce going throughout the United States and to markets overseas.

So the Waterways Commerce Cutter was just approved by the Department of Homeland Security to enter initial production for the first eight. That is being built by Birdon, is the shipbuilder, down in Bayou La Batre, Alabama. And so those cutters, state of the art, will replace the aging but still very viable cutters, like Wyaconda that operates and homeported out of Dubuque, and provide the critical services necessary to keep commerce moving, which is vital to our economic prosperity.

Mrs. HINSON. Absolutely. Well, I am glad we share that priority. Do you have any insight into potential homeports for those cutters once they come off of the line and they are done being built in Louisiana?

Admiral LUNDAY. Congresswoman, I don't have a homeport decision on all of the Waterways Commerce Cutters that will be built. Some of them will be larger than many of the existing ones, and so we will have to assess what the infrastructure needs are as we go forward. But we look forward to working with members of the committee as we make those decisions along with the administration.

Mrs. HINSON. Thank you for that.

My last question today. You know, I heard you talk about how important interdiction is. You mentioned Florida and the Caribbean being the other element of the southern border. We think about the Rio Grande and the States, but really, it is about what is happening at sea in preventing those bad actors, particularly many of those who are backed by international criminal gangs or adversarial governments, like the CCP, from being able to exploit our U.S. ports and waterways. And we know PRC is one of the leading sources of counterfeit goods coming into our country, illegal trans-shipments, trying to get around our trade laws, deceptive shipping practices, right. They use that transnational shipment constantly to get around sanctions enforcement.

So can you speak a little to the Coast Guard's role in enforcing and identifying and then interdicting those types of shipments in coordination, maybe, with other agencies under Homeland Security?

Admiral LUNDAY. Representative Hinson, we work very closely with other parts of Homeland Security and the intelligence community to enforce the U.S. requirements and restrictions on illegal or unauthorized shipments, particularly by those states that sponsor those shipments that we prevent from coming into the country.

We are concerned about the activities of the CCP, whether it is illegal movement of goods that are prohibited for entry or whether it is presenting threats in cyberspace to our maritime critical infrastructure.

And we have been busy, not only our operational commanders in Atlantic and Pacific area, but Coast Guard Cyber Command, working with the Department of Homeland Security and others, to make sure that we can improve the cybersecurity of our port critical infrastructure so that others that may seek to hold it at risk will be unable to do so. And we can—the American people can be sure that infrastructure is resilient and can withstand the threat of any attack or disruption.

Mrs. HINSON. Are you utilizing AI at all in that technology? You mentioned the cyberspace specifically, but are you using any of those technologies to help track or even anticipate potential attacks or need for interdiction?

Admiral LUNDAY. We are using AI technology with others in the cyber operation space with U.S. Cyber Command and CISA within the Department of Homeland Security. And I can follow up with more specifics about how we use that.

Mrs. HINSON. That would be great. And if we need to go into SCIF to talk about that, happy to do that. Thank you very much, sir.

I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you.

The ranking member of the full committee, Ms. DeLauro, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your questions.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you. Thank you very much. And my apologies to you, Mr. Chairman, and ranking member and to Admiral Lunday. Between today and tomorrow, there are 11 hearings, so just trying to do what I am supposed to do as ranking member of

the committee. So I want to thank Chairman Amodei and also Ranking Member Underwood.

And let me just say a thank you to you for your service. I look forward to getting your insights into several pressing issues.

First, it will come as no surprise to you that I am a strong proponent of the MH-60 program. And the Coast Guard has utilized the MH-60 aircraft since the first one came into service in 1990. Throughout its over 30 years of service in the Coast Guard, it has undergone upgrades to components, engines, life support equipment, and, most of all, avionics.

The latest acquisition directors have plans for the Coast Guard to use MH-60 aircraft well into the 2030s. Currently, no alternative helicopter or aircraft platform with the necessary capabilities to meet your mission objectives: search and rescue, routine patrol, and Homeland Security.

First, let me ask you if you agree that the MH-60T, given its utility tactical transport, will be essential to the Coast Guard operations well into the future.

Admiral LUNDAY. Ranking Member DeLauro, the H-60 will be essential. Regardless of the mix, it is the key component in a rotary wing fleet and the backbone of our aviation fleet. So whatever that mix ends up being, the 60 will be a mainstay, as it has been.

Ms. DELAURO. Mm-hmm. Well, let me just—I am glad to hear you say that. And as you continue to retire the MH-65, you know, plans for procurement, will it include the new hulls as well as the current recapitalization strategy?

Admiral LUNDAY. Ranking Member DeLauro, I—I am not able to discuss the specifics within the reconciliation or the President's budget request yet.

Ms. DELAURO. Okay.

Admiral LUNDAY. But one of the things we learned out of the challenge we had with the 19,000-hour limitation on our operation of the 60s is we need to be moving to purchase new hulls rather than beginning with hulls that have high time on them when we acquire them. That is the direction we need to be moving.

Ms. DELAURO. So we need to be watching what comes out in the budget.

Admiral LUNDAY. Yes, Ranking Member DeLauro.

Ms. DELAURO. Okay. Right. And we will certainly, then, be back to you about that. Okay.

Admiral LUNDAY. Thank you.

Ms. DELAURO. Let me follow up on an issue that I raised with the Commandant last year, the issue of sexual assault in the Coast Guard. Not going to recap the troubling history that predates this hearing, including years of unreported allegations of sexual assault at the Academy.

Following the accountability and transportation review in November of 2023, the Commandant directed 33 initial actions to strengthen the climate and practices. On August 9, 2024, update noted that, at the time, 18 of those directed actions had been completed.

My questions are, as of today, how many of the directed actions have been completed?

Admiral LUNDAY. Ranking Member DeLauro, as of today, 21 of those 33 directed actions have been completed. We are hard at work to complete the remaining ones and identify—

Ms. DELAURO. What is your timeline on the remaining?

Admiral LUNDAY. Ranking Member DeLauro, I can get back to you with the specific timeline on those remaining actions. The three that were most recently completed since that August letter that you described were improvements to security in the Chase Hall cadet barracks at the Academy, the start of our sentinel resiliency training that includes bystander intervention training and additional sexual assault prevention response training for those coming out of boot camp. And then I will provide additional information for the record.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you. I would appreciate that. And I think—maybe you can just assert—but we have your commitment to provide this committee with the regular updates as additional actions are completed. I think that that would be helpful to us to know what is going on and how we are trying to meet the needs of the Coast Guard—of the Coasties who are there.

Admiral LUNDAY. I will, Ranking Member DeLauro, because combatting and eliminating sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Coast Guard is a top priority. These are not only serious crimes, but they are a cancer at readiness and they cause grievous harm to people. And so it is important that we continue this as a top priority to eliminate sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Ms. DELAURO. I am pleased to hear that. It has been—you know, I have been around here long enough to be at these hearings to know that this has been a consistent problem. I do want to say that I thought the Commandant was working and working diligently at doing that, but now asking you if you will continue to follow that up. It is also my understanding that the Department of Homeland Security of the—the Inspector General may be conducting additional oversight on this matter.

Admiral LUNDAY. Ranking Member DeLauro, the Coast Guard continues to fully cooperate—

Ms. DELAURO. Great.

Admiral LUNDAY [continuing]. With the investigation by the DHS Inspector General.

Ms. DELAURO. Okay. That is what—again, making that assumption in your commitment to cooperating that effort.

And what my hope is, is that this can be a start of a dialogue between you and I. I very much, as I said, respected and appreciated the Commandant's response. And we had an ongoing conversation about this effort. And I know of her commitment to wanting to address this issue and to do something about it because of the critical—critical role that the Coast Guard plays and the critical role that women play in this effort and want to realize their dreams or aspirations through the Coast Guard, and they want to feel that they are safe at that issue. So I look forward to having that same kind of a dialogue on a, you know, regular basis with you as well.

Let me deal with what I call quality of life issues. And I believe, just as the service never wavers, our support of the U.S. Coast Guard and our Armed Forces must be resolute and unwavering, as

all of you are. And that includes ensuring that we continue to focus on the quality of life issues for servicemembers.

Cost of living. The cost of living crisis in this country is crushing families, and the members of the Coast Guard, unfortunately, are not exempt from the soaring costs of groceries, childcare, housing. The list goes on. Those who have already made great sacrifices, we should be doing everything that we can to ensure that they can raise a family and to make ends meet.

I have been encouraged to see that the Coast Guard senior leadership embrace the notion in the past several years. I am told that these efforts have been really helpful in recruitment and retention efforts. But more needs to get done, and Congress needs to make sure that you have the investments to follow through.

What, in your view, remain some of the biggest quality of life concerns for members of the Coast Guard? And do I have your commitment to continue to prioritize quality of life concerns, especially those associated with the rising costs of living?

Admiral LUNDAY. Ranking Member DeLauro, the cornerstone of the Coast Guard's readiness or of unit readiness starts with the readiness of every single Coast Guard man or woman and their families. On that cornerstone, we build the readiness of the whole service.

And so issues that impact that readiness, the most pressing are access to available housing, access to childcare, child development services, access to the basic pay that they need to be successful. And that is why the support from the committee and Congress to address the targeted pay increase for junior enlisted personnel was so important for the Coast Guard and the other armed services as well.

And then access to quality healthcare, which can be a particular challenge for our Coast Guard families and personnel because we are often located in remote areas away from population centers. So we have to work harder to—either with organic capability or access through TRICARE—to make sure they have the best access to available medical care as well.

Ms. DELAURO. I thank you for that answer. And I thank the chairman for letting me go over, as I have here.

But I think it is critical—in my prior question about, you know, feeling safe, there is a morale problem that is quality of life. People need to feel safe. And we have to understand here that addressing the issues that ensure that folks have the necessary healthcare, the access to that healthcare wherever they are, whatever remote outpost they might be, and that childcare, housing, basic pay are critical in understanding it. That is the only way, to repeat what you have said, that we are going to have the robust readiness that we need to be able to address any—any eventuality.

I thank you for your service. I thank you for your answers. I look forward to really—just this one last thing. I worked very, very hard to make sure that when we did shut the government down, and the Coast Guard folks were not included, that that turned—we got that turned around for the Coast Guard so that they were not—those families were not left out in the cold with regard to the where-withal that they needed to be safe and secure with their families. So I thank you.

And I yield back my time. And I thank you graciously, Mr. Chairman, for your time.

Mr. AMODEI. Yes, ma'am.

Mr. Guest, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Admiral, I want to talk a little bit about the high north. I know you mentioned that in your testimony. You say on page 3 of your testimony that the service's top surface acquisition priority remains the Polar Security Cutters and expanding the icebreaking fleet to meet the President's direction. And you said that we shall continue to invest in heavy polar icebreaking is vital to counter foreign malign influence and protect America's sovereign interests in the polar regions.

I know that currently we are at a very strategic disadvantage when it comes to other nations. I think currently we have one heavy icebreaker, the Polar Star, which is approximately 50 years in service. And then we have the Healy, which is a Polar-capable icebreaker. So two icebreakers compared to the 50-plus that Russia currently has.

We know that the high north is very—become very strategic and will continue to be so. And I know that there is underway the process of building the first icebreaker I think in 50 years here domestically, and proud that the Coast Guard is moving in that direction. But want to just see if you can talk a little bit about the importance of sustained funding for the Polar Security Cutter program.

Admiral LUNDAY. Congressman, the Polar Security Cutter program is our top acquisition priority. We are excited about fulfilling the President's intent about building a fleet of icebreakers for the Nation because of the Coast Guard operates those icebreakers. They operate it to assure access to our polar regions, both the Arctic and Antarctica, and then also our domestic icebreaking fleet for the Great Lakes and inland waterways.

The Polar Security Cutter is the first of the next generation of heavy icebreakers that we are building right now. And we are beginning to see substantial acceleration forward in momentum. The shipbuilder, Bollinger Mississippi, we just received approval for them to begin full production on Polar Security Cutter number 1 on the 30th of April, just a few weeks ago.

They have got over 95 percent 2D and functional design maturity that enables them to move forward with confidence, and they already are constructing 10 of the prefabrication assembly units, which are the bottom center sections of that new icebreaker.

These are complex vessels. They will provide the U.S. with the capability we need to assure and protect U.S. sovereignty in the polar regions.

Mr. GUEST. And I want to shift gears a little bit and talk about the interdiction mission of the Coast Guard, particularly as it relates to the mission in the Gulf and the Pacific. As you have referenced in your testimony, the President, when he was sworn in, immediately declared a state of emergency along the southwest border. He surged resources. We have seen the number of immigrants encounter drop dramatically along the southwest border, and we are seeing more and more individuals being pushed out from the land routes into sea routes. And we are also seeing more

and more narcotics which are no longer being able to be brought in the country across what was an unsecured border. We are seeing more and more maritime operations.

You mentioned in your testimony, in the first 4 months of fiscal year 2025, we seized more cocaine than we did all of fiscal year 2024. You talk about the 860 illegal aliens that have been interdicted trying to enter the country along our sea routes.

So talk a little bit about the importance of that mission as, I believe, we are going to see particularly drug cartels become more and more desperate to get their product into the United States, they are going to see more and more individuals that they are going to try to use the sea routes as a way to bring those narcotics in. And so talk a little bit about the importance of that mission, and then also if you have the resources that you need to maintain this heightened operational tempo that we have seen over the last 3 to 4 months.

Admiral LUNDAY. Congressman, the operations we are doing across the southern border—we view the southern border, along with the rest of DHS, as a system. And so much like when you squeeze or tighten down on one part—the land border, for example, and the Coast Guard is operating on the Rio Grande River as part of that effort—we see elements of that flow or that vector try to make their way across other areas of the border.

And so we are seeing an increase in activity off southern California. As we see it, increased smuggling attempts, moving illegal migration and also drugs, trying to get those into not only San Diego but further up the coast up toward Los Angeles as well. And so the Coast Guard has increased our presence and operations, and along with the Customs and Border Protection, to make sure we can interdict and then deter those attempts.

And so that requires not only an increased presence but sustaining that presence over time, and improving our capabilities, increase surveillance and sensors, so that we can queue our forces to be able to better interdict those smuggling attempts.

You know, these attempts are dangerous, and we had a—one of these smuggling vessels flip over in the surf off of San Diego last week that resulted in the deaths of three people, including a minor. And so these efforts are critical to stop, not only to protect our border but save lives as well.

And so we do need increased and sustained top-line funding to be able to generate and sustain the assets—ships, cutters, boats, and aircraft and sensors—necessary to enable us to protect that maritime approach to the U.S. border off of California, off of Texas and the Gulf of America, and then off of Florida and U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Mr. GUEST. Admiral, thank you for being here today, and thank you for your service.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. The gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Ciscomani, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Admiral, for being here. Thank you for answering our questions and helping shine the light on all the good work that

men and women in the Coast Guard do. And thank you for your service.

I represent a district in Arizona, Sixth Congressional District. It is a border district. It includes portions of the southwest border. So while I—you know, Coast Guard doesn't come up every day in my desert district. It is something that—I know that it is very linked to the issues that we deal with. And I will just piggyback off what Congressman Guest was talking about regarding the border.

So if you can build a little more on the—both on the migrant apprehension side—and we know that the numbers have dipped at the land areas of the border. But if you can speak a little bit of the challenges that we are facing with migrants and how your mission set is increasing, and how will your budget request help with these efforts, especially since I understand that the Coast Guard has continued to direct relatively large numbers of migrants in the Florida straits and off the San Diego as well.

So can you speak a little bit on that?

Admiral LUNDAY. Thank you, Congressman, because we are not doing this mission alone. And I want to make sure I recognize we are getting great support from the Department of Defense. Two Navy destroyers have been assigned to this mission, including off of California, and they are providing critical capability to support our needs in areas where we have gaps.

But the challenges we are getting after with the smuggling attempts, we are seeing a range of conveyances, whether it is personal watercraft that move quickly, under cover of darkness, these high-speed outboard engine equipped—what we call pangas—fast boats that move drugs or people quickly in attempts to cross the border. And so working together with the Navy, with other members of DHS, is critically important.

But we are continually hampered by pressure for sustaining and operating our assets. Our boats and our ships are—we are not able to maintain them at the rate we need to. And so they are not always as available as we need them to be when a mission demand occurs or an operational case is detected.

And so to be successful, persistent, and harden our operational posture over the long term on the southern border, we need increased investment and sustainment for more modern assets that we are able to repair and keep operating with a greater availability.

Mr. CISCOMANI. You know, you mentioned something on the partnerships and the work—the collaboration you are having with DOD and other departments. When it comes down to the technology, I guess, and with CBP, how is that—how are you able to communicate, and the intelligence maybe that is shared, or how do you coordinate specifically with CBP or Border Patrol?

Admiral LUNDAY. Congressman, we are building on a very strong relationship with our brothers and sisters in Customs and Border Patrol already. We operate particularly—San Diego is just one example—under what we call a Regional Coordinating Mechanism, a ReCoM. That is a very strong team that works seamlessly together. Because it doesn't matter between us and CBP and other team members who gets the credit. It is all about the outcome and working together to achieve that.

And so we start with those key ingredients. And then as we have seen the increased participation by the Department of Defense, under U.S. Northern Command, including the naval elements that I mentioned before, they have seamlessly integrated into that operation as well. And so we are seeing their advanced sensor capability.

And then the work of the intelligence community provide additional insights and awareness for us so that we can be better postured and then conduct those interdictions and control, secure, and defend the border and the maritime approaches.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Excellent. Thank you. Thanks for what you do. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Admiral, I have got a couple areas I want to cover generally before we wrap up. And these are ones that can be—I would like you to kind of respond to us later, not at the hearing.

I don't know what the mix should be for your mission in terms of manned versus unmanned aircraft. I think one of your big selling points is your personnel, folks sitting behind you, and you sitting there in front. I mean, there is nothing wrong with that.

But as we talk about making less do more—and I am not suggesting what the answer is, but I think it is appropriate for us to have an idea of here is how that is being incorporated as we go forward, especially in this new time when we talk about reconciliation, fiscal year 2026, that sort of stuff, so that it is one of those things that we have checked on.

So I am happy to talk with you folks offline about that, not that it will be a secret, but we want to know that—everybody else is talking about the wonders of this and that in terms of as a force multiplier and those sorts of things. So that is one of the boxes I think we need to check.

Shore site infrastructure is always one of those things that is not sex and violence, but nonetheless, when we talk about doing the right thing in terms of cutters, in terms of regions, in terms of air operations, and all that other sort of stuff—and it is not a blame thing, it is just a reality, that shore site infrastructure has not been the tip of the spear, if you will, for a long time. And that is—like I said, you have got your mission to do, you got to take care of your people, you got to take care of your equipment. You have got all that stuff.

But nonetheless, it probably is an appropriate time to go, okay, as we sit here to jump off in terms of potentially some historic funding in terms of reconciliation, as well as going forward into the next fiscal year, that is one of the areas I think we need to be able to say in our work product when somebody goes—it is like, well, we have talked about that and here is what our understanding is, and so that there has at least been a discussion and the consideration when the inevitable discussion comes on the floor for the Homeland bill, that we can say with some factual basis—I know that is kind of novel these days in some corridors—but some factual basis, well, we have talked about that and here is where we are at.

The Indo-Pacific is—God bless you. And by the way, shout-out to your folks in District 11 who have basically had the unenviable task of picking me up in Minden, Nevada, in a C-27 out of the Sac-

ramento base and getting me down to San Diego to look at everything you are doing as well as some of the other folks down there. Absolutely impressive organization of time and whatever.

So if anybody wants to go to San Diego for a break, don't have these guys do it for you because we hit the ground running. There were demonstrations in terms of Customs Border Patrol stuff on the aircraft on the way down, right off onto the boats.

And listen, for a guy from a State without a coastline, that is kind of—it is a little scary, you know, when you are—but I was in good hands. And hats off to that command structure and those folks all the way through the organization.

But as we look at that Indo-Pacific region and you are talking about people swimming around a fence, boats turning over in surf, people, you know—rolling them up on the beach and running—even some folks running through the yard of your Commander down there, it is—it is not a last post for retirement. I understand that. But as we talk about things a little farther offshore, obviously everybody focuses on the Customs Border Patrol mission.

But we want to make sure that we have spent some time on, so what is going on on the mundane stuff like fishing, stuff like that, which is also part of the mission. Lucky you folks. So we need to—we need to make sure that we have kind of hit that.

And then I think the questions regarding migrant interdiction have been pretty good. The one thing I want to put on your folks' radar screen, though, is—one of our sayings here is, is we won't surprise you, and we don't want you to surprise us. So if you have an idea right now, I would appreciate it.

And maybe I shouldn't be nervous about it, but I am nervous about—that is great that everything, all these assets are integrated with DOD and all these other agencies, and blah, blah, blah. But when you talk about naval vessels, you know, in the Gulf or off the coast of San Diego—I am sure there is drone technology being whatever and all that—do you expect to get billed by DOD or the individual services—Navy, Marines—you know, when you see vehicles running around, air assets, rotary wing, drone, whatever it is—do you expect to have any bills back to you from the Navy or whatever saying, Hey, love supporting you; here's the bill?

Admiral LUNDAY. Thank you, Chairman.

With respect to the two Navy ships that have been supporting us, we do not expect any requests for reimbursement for the Navy for those operations. That has never been part of our discussion, specific to those assets that are supporting us.

Mr. AMODEI. So my ongoing request of you during this hearing is, as soon as the canary starts to cough in that mine and somebody goes, hey, by the way, I hope you folks are saving up because we are getting ready to send you a bill, we need to know about it soonest. Because based on the information we have got so far, we are not planning for any of that.

And so you know the old saying; it works in your mission as well as anybody's: Forewarned is forearmed. So we are thinking there is no warning due at the moment. So if any of that starts to change, comms needs to kick into active gear.

Admiral LUNDAY. Understand, Mr. Chairman. I will work with the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense to make sure we tell you if that has changed.

Mr. AMODEI. Okay. Last thing is—and every Federal organization that I am aware of struggles with this. And I like what I have heard so far. But obviously you have got the right concern regarding, hey, we got to take care of our folks with all their stuff. So the challenge will be—and as the Ranking Member of the full committee indicated and the Ranking Member of this committee indicated, it is like, we got to keep that balance in terms of how we are taking care of our peeps with—obviously, with equipment facilities but also with what is going on with recruiting, which I understand is—has ticked up a lot, and that is good. But obviously, along with all the other multitasking, I am glad to hear that that is part of the deal, we are trying to keep an eye on that and will continue to.

With that, I think I have missed Mr. Gonzales. The floor is yours for 5 minutes for questions.

Mr. GONZALES. Thank you, Chairman, for holding this hearing. And thank you, Admiral, for being here.

I mean, just to piggyback off the chairman, this is the committee that wants to make sure you have all the tools to be successful. My team knows that—you know, they put the binder together, and oftentimes I don't even use any of the notes, right. I create my own questions. Not today, right. Today, for all the staffers out there, I am going to read word for word what I have been given.

And the reason being is I just got back from a trip from Japan where I met with the Prime Minister, and he brought up Alaska, which I thought was interesting.

So my question to you, Admiral, is this. As we work to ensure Coast Guard is on track to meet the President's objectives to expand our fleet and strengthen our maritime presence, we have a need to make sure that we have the infrastructure necessary to meet these goals, especially as we work to enhance our presence in the Arctic.

It is my understanding that plans to develop United States' first deep-water Arctic port in Nome, Alaska, was further delayed last year due to the Army Corps' cancellation of solicitation due to costs overruns. In my view, it is critical that we stay diligent in ensuring we move to build the infrastructure we need to be able to dock our military assets and catch up with the increasing presence of Russia and Chinese in Arctic waters.

Admiral, can you speak to how the Coast Guard would utilize a fully developed deep-water port in Alaska for operations in the Arctic?

Admiral LUNDAY. Congressman, we are the principal surface operational fleet for the United States in the Arctic region, and we are permanently based in Alaska. As to a permanent deep-water port in Nome or on the north slope, north coast, we have been looking at that issue and working with the Corps of Engineers. I want to make sure I get you the most coordinated answer back, along with the Corps of Engineers, including that latest information which I did not have. So I would like to follow up with a briefing or with that for the record, sir.

Mr. GONZALES. Okay. That would be great.

Here is a little softer of a question. Can you further expand on the strategic importance of having the Arctic port in Alaska as it relates to the Arctic security?

Admiral LUNDAY. Well, sir, Alaska is what makes us an Arctic Nation. And so our Coast Guard's strong presence, permanent presence that is based out of there, is very important for our operations there, and ensuring the control, secure, and defense of our border in and around Alaska as well.

We are going to be adding a permanent new asset up there in the coming years. In fact, this is the new commercially available icebreaker, what will be the Storis. It will sail on the first of June through the canal and up into the Gulf of Alaska above the Arctic Circle. What it will do operations—it will eventually be homeported in Juneau, which will be part of its permanent homeport once that is complete.

And so we are continuing to increase our footprint there. That is one of many assets that will be—as we do modernization—will be moving up to be permanently assigned in Alaska.

Mr. GONZALES. Thank you for that.

You know, we often talk about these in broad strokes but, you know, this is the Appropriations Committee. This is where we want to know the details, where we want to know what specific needs that you may have as you work with the DHS Secretary and the administration to work on that.

My final question is this: Does the Coast Guard anticipate needing access to additional deep-water ports in the Arctic as it increases operations in the region?

Admiral LUNDAY. Congressman, I don't have any specific needs identified at this point, but I will take your question back and will give you a more complete answer, because that is an important answer as we look at our future force structure and force posture in Alaska as part of the Arctic.

Mr. GONZALES. Well, thank you for your testimony today. And, once again, I look forward to working together. Certainly our committee looks forward to working with you as well.

Chairman, I yield back.

Admiral LUNDAY. Thank you, sir.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you.

Admiral, it is our job as members of the committee to make sure the Department is appropriately spending money Congress provides, as well as to ensure the Department has the resources it needs to execute its missions on an annual basis. In my view, the Coast Guard has chronically underasked for resources. That is not an ignoble thing, but has chronically underasked for resources. I need you to tell me what you need.

Additionally, the Coast Guard's strategy should be based on how the services would optimally act, not what it could do in a resource-constrained world.

Now, I know that is easy to say, and there is a few moving parts in that, but it is on the record of me saying that to you folks so those folks who may be watching farther up the chain can hear the same thing that you heard.

There may be some additional questions members provide in writing and we ask you to respond to those in a timely manner.

I would like to thank you for being here today.

Budget constraints have made the service risk adverse when it comes to adopting new technologies. Often an upfront investment can save an agency in the long term. For example, unmanned aircraft can be a cost-effective tool for the Coast Guard. I expect you will be a good partner in the upcoming fiscal year 2026 appropriations process, and I ask for your commitment to keep open lines of communication between this committee and the Coast Guard. That includes getting us your responses to questions in a timely fashion. For the get back questions that members of the committee have had today, we ask that you respond within 15 days. If there are other ones in writing, then we would like a 30-day timeframe.

Now, that is not in a vacuum where it is like, oh, you guys don't have anything to do but answer these questions. But just so you understand what everybody's tempo looks like these days, I expect to be in full committee markup the second week in June. That is nothing that anybody can put out over whatever, but that is just my speculation. And I also expect to be on the floor with the Homeland bill in the second week in June.

Mr. AMODEI. So it is not like, hey, I know you guys, you got plenty to do, but so do we. And if we are going to be well-informed, then those questions that have been put out, we need those responses to it. And if that slips a little bit, I am a bad predictor and I will take that responsibility, but that is kind of what is driving our request for response in those ways.

And that doesn't mean necessarily it needs to be, hey, somebody needs to write a term paper or whatever. If it can be handled with a phone call to the ranking member or to the ranking member of the committee or to one of us or to the committee staff, that is fine. If it turns out we need something more, then we will get back to you. But nobody is going to criticize you for trying to be efficient with your use of time and your resources.

And so, with that, I would like to thank again the witness for being here today. I apologize for being here a little bit late. I hope I have made that up.

And, with that, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:17 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
From Wednesday May 14, 2025 Hearing:

“Oversight of the U.S. Coast Guard”

Before the House Appropriations Committee – Homeland Security Subcommittee (HAC-HLS)

Witness:

Admiral Kevin Lunday, Acting Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard

QFRs Submitted by Congressman Underwood

COAST GUARD – SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION, RESPONSE & INVESTIGATION

BACKGROUND: Per Representative Underwood, “The Coast Guard continues to implement Admiral Fagan’s 33 directed actions in response to Operation Fouled Anchor, regarding this implementation please provide response to the below questions.

QUESTION PART-1: Please explain how much funding in the Fiscal Year 2025 spend plan is specifically dedicated to sexual assault prevention, trauma-informed survivor services, and independent investigations.

ANSWER -PART-1: The Fiscal Year 2025 Spend Plan included funding to support sexual assault prevention/ response/ recovery at the Coast Guard Academy by adding mental health professionals to the staff and additional operating funds (four total positions, \$827,000). Additionally, the Spend Plan added support for the Enterprise Victim Advocate program, which is related to a directed action (three total positions, \$762,000). Finally, the Spend Plan supported the stand up of the Integrated Primary Prevention program, which is geared toward preventing harmful behaviors in the workplace (15 total positions, \$2.2 million). All of these investments are included under “Workforce Support” within the Spend Plan.

QUESTION PART-2: Please also provide this information as it relates to the Fiscal Year 2026 budget request, if available.

ANSWER -PART-2: In addition to the amounts requested in the FY 2025 Spend Plan, the Fiscal Year 2026 President’s Budget includes targeted investments to support sexual assault prevention, trauma-informed survivor services, and independent investigations:

- 20 Behavioral Health Specialist positions to strengthen the Coast Guard’s mental health infrastructure (\$2.4 million).
- Eight Human Resource positions to address staffing shortfalls and enhance implementation of the Service’s accountability and transparency initiatives (\$987,000).
- Six positions supporting sexual assault and sexual harassment response efforts and Coast Guard Investigative Service investigations, focused on reducing risk and ensuring timely, professional investigations into criminal misconduct (\$654,000).
- Five positions and base funding dedicated to implementing Military Justice Reform, as mandated in the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (\$985,000).
- Two positions for Sexual Assault Prevention, Response, and Recovery Victim Services, including suicide prevention and enhanced victim support (\$582,000).

- 11 positions at the Coast Guard Academy to improve leadership presence and oversight of the Cadet Corps (\$1.4 million).
- 17 positions and funding to support the Sentinel Transformation and Readiness Training (START) Course, ensuring new personnel are effectively prepared for modern mission requirements (\$2.1 million).

MIGRANT DETENTION FLIGHTS

BACKGROUND: Per Representative Underwood, “At the Hearing, Admiral Lunday stated that as of the date of the Hearing (14MAY25) the Coast Guard had conducted 157 migrant removal flights.”

QUESTION PART-1: What is the total cost of those flights?

ANSWER PART-1: The total cost of these 157 flights is \$9,359,207.76.

QUESTION PART-2: What types of aircraft were used for each of these flights, and how many hours were flown on these flights?

ANSWER PART-2: The Coast Guard has used C-27s and C-130s to conduct these flights. As of the date of the hearing, 34 hours were flown by C-27s and 434 hours were flown by C-130s.

QUESTION PART-3: Please provide the number of Coast Guard personnel required to prepare and operate each flight.

ANSWER PART-3: Each flight requires 19 Coast Guard personnel and 3 Customs and Border Protection personnel. This includes the flight crew (5), ground maintenance team (5), Coast Guard Security Force (3), and ground logistics, coordination, scheduling support (6). Additionally, Customs and Border Protection Security Forces (3) support each flight.

LONG-RANGE COMMAND AND CONTROL AIRCRAFT

BACKGROUND: Per Representative Underwood, “This multi-part question is in regard to the Coast Guard’s Long-Range Command and Control Aircraft.”

QUESTION PART-1: Has the Coast Guard received any outreach, requests, or any communication from anyone in the Office of the Secretary, or from any political appointee in the Trump Administration regarding the decision to include an additional Long-Range Command and Control Aircraft in the Fiscal Year 2025 spend plan?

ANSWER PART-1: The acting Commandant of the Coast Guard made the decision to include the Long-Range Command and Control Aircraft in the Fiscal Year 2025 spend plan. The acting Commandant made that decision in coordination with the Administration.

QUESTION PART-2: If yes please explain the nature of these communications.

ANSWER PART-2: The communication between the Coast Guard and the Administration regarding the inclusion of a Long-Range Command and Control Aircraft in the Fiscal Year 2025 spend plan was routine coordination for the required submission of a full year continuing resolution spend plan.

QFR Submitted by Congressman Case**COAST GUARD PRESENCE IN THE PACIFIC**

BACKGROUND: Per Representative Case, "Under Action Order 1, Acting Commandant Lunday directed Coast Guard operational presence and focus to the U.S. maritime borders and approaches. This resulted in a surge of resources and assets primarily to the southwest and southeast maritime borders, including deploying a C-130 and its crew from Air Station Barbers Point in District 14 to District 11 for migrant relocation flights and redirecting USCGS Kimball from supporting the Navy on a mission in the Western Pacific to a drug interdiction mission in the Eastern Pacific. While the President and Coast Guard leadership have the authority to reprioritize missions, according to 6 USC 468, the Coast Guard's missions or capability to perform those missions may not be substantially or significantly reduced. This includes its statutory defense readiness mission."

QUESTION PART-1: For an administration that identifies the People's Republic of China as the United States' "biggest threat," that means defense readiness in the Pacific should be a high priority. How has the Coast Guard adjusted its presence in the Pacific and why?

ANSWER PART-1: The Coast Guard increased presence in the Pacific by expending 3,000 additional cutter resource hours compared to this time last year. Additionally, the Coast Guard continues to coordinate with partner agencies, such as the Department of Defense, for increased presence and capability in the region.

QUESTION PART-2: What specifically is being moved or reprioritized and does the Coast Guard assess it will still be able to carry out its 11 statutory missions in the Pacific with the reduction?

ANSWER PART-2: Cutter and aircraft asset movement is in support of the Administration's priorities and Executive Orders with a focus on addressing the national emergency on the southern border. The operational commanders continue to adjust assigned forces to meet all regional mission demands.

QUESTION PART-3: How many missions in the Pacific had run by this point of last fiscal year compared to this fiscal year, and what were the focuses and destinations of all of those missions?

ANSWER PART-3: Compared to this time last year, the Coast Guard executed approximately the same total number of aviation resource hours in the Pacific with 1,000 of those hours reallocated to the California-Mexico Maritime Boundary Line. Compared to this time last year, the Coast Guard has conducted 3,000 additional cutter resource hours in the Pacific for migrant operations along the California-Mexico Maritime Boundary Line.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2025.

OVERSIGHT OF U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

WITNESS

**PETE FLORES, ACTING COMMISSIONER, U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER
PROTECTION**

Mr. AMODEI. The Subcommittee on Homeland Security will come to order.

Welcome, Acting Commissioner Flores. Thank you for being here.

Two weeks ago, the Office of Management and Budget released its skinny fiscal year 2026 budget request. While we await the details of the full request, the focus of this hearing will be on U.S. Customs and Border Protection's priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

I will now turn to my colleague, the distinguished gentlelady from Illinois, Ms. Underwood, for your opening remarks.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Acting Commissioner Flores. It is nice to see you again. I would like to note that you have taken this position as a career official. You are not serving in a political capacity. So we appreciate your service, and thank you for being here today.

You are currently the head of one of the Nation's oldest and most versatile Federal agencies, responsible for addressing changing and increasingly challenging issues—the enforcement of complex trade and agricultural laws and policies; securing our borders from illicit activities, including narcotics and human trafficking; facilitating lawful trade and travel through our ports of entry; and representing American values to visitors and around the world.

CBP's work is made harder by our broken immigration system and Congress's failure to fix it. Since January 20th, you have also been at the mercy of fast-paced and chaotic directives from the administration to meet unfeasible goals that are putting enormous strain on CBP's resources and operational abilities.

The constant whiplash on tariffs and new policies that are deterring international tourism are already impacting CBP, threatening our economic security and the financial stability of your agency. On top of that, the Secretary is commandeering resources for politicized security theater that has already put DHS investigations and officers at risk.

The President is dangerously downgrading our relationship with Canada, one of our most important allies and a critical partner on

trade and northern-border security. And our Vice President is joking about detaining tourists who come here to enjoy the 2026 World Cup.

The Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration reports that international visitors to the United States already fell 12 percent compared to this same time last year, and airlines are reporting that bookings for the summer are also looking lower.

In addition to hurting the American economy, threats to tourism and trade impact CBP's daily operations because, as international air passengers decline, so do your fee collections associated with that travel. The U.S. is now on track to lose over \$12 billion in international travel spending this year, which would likely increase CBP's budget needs for fiscal year 2026, putting pressure on this subcommittee to find savings from other parts of DHS.

I know your agency is already monitoring this decline in previously projected growth, but I ask you to keep us informed about how this may change in this fiscal year and the next to ensure CBP has the resources it needs.

One of the resources we have invested in over the years has been the deployment of non-intrusive inspection technologies that are vital in the detection of deadly narcotics and cross-border traffic. There is much more to be done to stem the flow of these deadly narcotics across our borders, and continued investment in both personnel and technology at the ports is critical to keeping our communities safe.

I am committed to improving our security at and between the ports of entry and facilitating trade and travel, but I am also committed to doing so in a way that is consistent with our values as Americans, our founding constitutional principles, and our responsibility to those in our care, including the most vulnerable individuals that CBP encounters, as well as the physical and emotional wellness of the CBP workforce.

In 2023, CBP launched a pilot in El Paso, Texas, focused on addressing the concerning rise in deaths by suicide of CBP personnel and providing services to improve the wellness of the CBP workforce. This program is saving lives. Reinvesting in CBP personnel and their families pays off. I was glad to see that the pilot has since expanded, and encourage you to grow and expand the program.

This type of investment only improves operational readiness, performance, retention, and recruitment. That is important, because hiring at CBP continues to be a challenge, especially for Border Patrol agents. While the Secretary touts a surge in recruitment, that does not translate into actual positions onboarded.

CBP is also facing a major issue with its CBP officer workforce due to the anticipated wave of retirements that will leave a major gap in our capacity if we don't continue to plan and invest in hiring them now.

I hope to hear more from you about your plans for addressing these issues and how Congress and specifically this committee can help on that front.

Thank you again for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony and answers to our questions.

I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you, ma'am.

Mr. Commissioner, when your staff has briefed you—by the way, is there any reason they are all frowning right now? It is kind of early for that.

Anyhow, if they briefed you, I traditionally do not do an opening statement. That is because, frankly, nobody has really asked me to do one. And so I am not going to do one today, which means we are going to go right to you and your opening statement.

Without objection, your full written testimony will be entered into the record. And with that in mind, we would ask you to summarize, to the extent you can, your opening statement to 5 minutes.

Mr. Acting Commissioner, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF PETE FLORES

Mr. FLORES. Thank you.

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Underwood, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection's operational priorities and share recent accomplishments.

As the Nation's unified border agency, CBP has a clear and critical mission: protect the American people by securing our borders from threats, enforcing our immigration and trade laws, and facilitating lawful trade and travel.

As you are aware, CBP's mission is complex, challenging, and, all too often, dangerous. Tomorrow, at our Valor Memorial, we will honor 11 heroes and all the men and women of CBP and its legacy agencies who died in the line of duty.

Every day, many of our employees endure intense physical and mental pressures. I am grateful this subcommittee continues to fund CBP's critical workforce care programs and support our exceptional people.

I could not be more proud to have spent my 37-year law enforcement career serving alongside such dedicated and talented employees.

I am also grateful to the members and staff of this subcommittee for their unwavering support of CBP's mission by ensuring we have the vital technology, equipment, infrastructure, and personnel resources to accomplish our broad security and facilitation responsibilities.

Today, I would like to share with you just some of CBP's recent accomplishments.

First, border security is national security.

Immediately following the President's declaration of a national emergency at the southern border, CBP took comprehensive action to expand our enforcement efforts, prevent illegal immigration and drug smuggling, and safeguard the American people.

At our ports of entry, with the termination of the CBP One app's scheduling function, CBP's Office of Field Operations began re-directing its critical and limited resources from processing illegal aliens to border security operations. Since January 21st, immigration processing actions at ports of entry decreased by 99 percent compared to the same time in 2024.

Between the ports of entry, the Border Patrol expanded its use of expedited removal and increased enforcement against cartels and other criminal organizations. We continue to experience a dramatic and historic decline in illegal crossings. In March, the Border Patrol encountered just under 7,200 illegal aliens along the southwest border, a nearly 95-percent decrease from March of 2024.

Complementing these enforcement efforts, CBP initiated border barrier construction for areas along our southwest border. More than 85 miles of new border barriers are already in various stages of planning and construction, including a recent contract awarded for approximately 7 miles in the Rio Grande Valley Sector. CBP is also working with DOD and the Texas National Guard to deploy temporary barriers.

Along our maritime borders, CBP's Air and Marine Operations realigned aircraft to increase patrols, resulting in a 71-percent increase in maritime apprehensions in southern California.

We remain vigilant across all our border environments and continuously adjust our operations as cartels seek to shift their activities to alternate routes.

It is clear that, during the first 4 months, the administration's policies, coupled with increased enforcement by CBP, DOD, and our Mexican counterparts, have significantly disrupted criminal activity along the southwest border. CBP's drug seizures have recently decreased. However, the amount of illegal drugs approaching our border remains alarmingly high, and we are intensifying our efforts.

And, finally, CBP was ready to immediately enforce the President's new tariffs by updating the Automated Commercial Environment, performing targeted inspections, and using clear guidance to operational personnel. As of May 2nd, CBP has successfully implemented 21 tariff-related Presidential actions, collecting more than \$37.9 billion in tariff-related revenue.

With your support, CBP will remain resilient and responsive to any new threats or challenges. We will continue to prioritize investments that strengthen our enforcement of immigration laws, degrade the threat of transnational criminal organizations and terrorists, and protect the Nation's economic security.

I look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]



Testimony
of

Pete R. Flores
Acting Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

before the

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security

on

"Oversight Hearing – U.S. Customs and Border Protection"

May 15, 2025
Washington, DC

Introduction

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Underwood, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to proudly discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) operational priorities and highlight recent accomplishments. As the nation's unified border security agency, CBP's critical mission is clear—protect the American people by securing our borders from threats, enforcing our immigration and trade laws, and facilitating lawful trade and travel.

Through a series of Executive Actions, President Trump has taken aim at strengthening U.S. border security and ensuring fair and competitive trade for American manufacturing and businesses. On January 20, 2025, President Trump declared a national emergency at the southern border.¹ This proclamation and subsequent Executive Orders direct departments and agencies to deploy all lawful means to secure the nation's borders and prevent illegal immigration into the United States.

Executive Orders 14159 and 14165, *Protecting the American People Against Invasion and Securing Our Borders*, direct the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its components to strengthen border security by implementing all measures to prevent illegal immigration, human trafficking, and drug smuggling to safeguard the American people. These orders direct the Secretary to expand the use of expedited removal and direct investments in infrastructure, technology, equipment, and CBP law enforcement positions. Furthermore, on April 2, 2025, the President proclaimed a *National Emergency to Increase our Competitive Edge, Protect our Sovereignty, and Strengthen our National and Economic Security* directing the implementation of baseline and reciprocal tariffs on foreign trading partners.

In the past four months, CBP has steadfastly implemented the President's actions² and has made significant strides across every area of our operations. I am proud to share with you just some of our recent accomplishments, including that border encounters have reached the lowest levels ever recorded, as we remain unwavering in our mission to prioritize American safety, secure the border, and enforce consequences for those who violate U.S. law.

Securing our Borders and Enforcing Immigration Laws

Border security is national security and remains a primary focus area for the Administration and DHS. With the termination of the CBP One app's scheduling function on January 20, 2025, CBP's Office of Field Operations began redirecting resources at our ports of entry away from processing illegal aliens for release into the country to critical border security operations. Starting January 21, 2025, immigration processing actions at ports of entry decreased by 99 percent³ compared to the same time frame in 2024. Office of Field Operations saw a 93 percent decrease in inadmissibility encounters at Southwest Border ports of entry, including a 94 percent decrease in unaccompanied alien children.

¹ Presidential Proclamation 10886

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions>

³ As of April 15, 2025.

Between the ports of entry, the U.S. Border Patrol and Air and Marine Operations continue to experience a dramatic and historic decline in illegal border crossings. Border Patrol encountered 8,193 illegal aliens in March 2025, representing a 73 percent decrease from 30,127 encounters in January 2025 and a 94 percent decrease from the 139,124 encounters in March 2024.⁴ This administration has ended catch-and-release and these illegal aliens are either quickly returned or detained. Border Patrol encountered 646 unaccompanied alien children in March 2025, a 92 percent decrease from 7,951 encountered in March 2024. We have also experienced a 95 percent decrease in the number of estimated gotaways.⁵ This unprecedented reduction in illegal crossings is a result of Executive Orders, increased enforcement efforts by Border Patrol agents as well as the increased patrols, infrastructure, personnel, and technology support provided by the Department of Defense (DoD). As a result of these decreases, CBP was able to transfer one and demobilize six temporary soft-sided facilities on the Southwest border, saving CBP approximately \$84 million per month. Additionally, traditional migrant corridors are seeing historically low numbers. For example, the number of migrants passing through the Darién Gap in Panama decreased 99.5 percent from 36,841 in March 2024 to 194 in March of 2025.

In line with the President's priorities, between January 20 and April 29, 2025, Air and Marine Operations conducted 11,800 land patrol hours with Border Patrol and 1,400 immigration enforcement-related flight hours with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the U.S. Marshals Service – a 32 percent increase from the same period last year. Joint operations with ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations include 240 flight hours supporting alien transportation and removal missions for more than 820 aliens. Air and Marine Operations has also shifted maritime patrol aircraft from foreign deployments to domestic coastline operations. This realignment, along with an increase in maritime patrol hours,⁶ has boosted Air and Marine Operations' overall aviation maritime operations by 9 percent leading to increased apprehensions, such as a 71 percent increase in maritime apprehensions in Southern California. Since January 20, 2025, Air and Marine Operations' efforts have contributed to a 25 percent increase in criminal arrests and the seizure of more than 400 pounds of fentanyl, a 52 percent increase from the same period last year.

CBP has also stepped up its efforts to interdict narcotics at the border. For about six weeks starting in January 2025, CBP participated in joint enforcement operations in Arizona, California, and the Pacific Northwest alongside its federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, and international partners.⁷ During these operations, CBP and its partners seized more than 13,348 pounds of illegal drugs, \$1.97 million in illicit U.S. currency, and 180 weapons, and arrested 317 individuals affiliated with transnational criminal organizations. It's clear that the increased frontline security presence by CBP and DoD, and increased enforcement by our Mexican and Canadian counterparts, in the past four months has deterred and disrupted transnational criminal organization activity. However, the amount of illegal drugs approaching our border is still alarmingly high.⁸

⁴ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>

⁵ A gotaway is an illegal entry that was detected and that all efforts to continue tracking the entry have stopped.

⁶ AMO logged 19,800 maritime patrol hours between January 20 and April 29, 2025, a 7 percent increase compared to the same period in 2024.

⁷ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-releases-february-2025-monthly-update>

⁸ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>

Complementing these enforcement activities, and as a key element of the President's EOs related to achieving operational control of the Southwest Border, CBP is taking immediate steps to plan and construct border barriers in areas where there are gaps in infrastructure and/or areas of high activity. CBP awarded a contract on March 15, 2025, for the construction of approximately seven miles of new border wall in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Sector.⁹ Furthermore, the Administration has requested billions of dollars through reconciliation to address border barrier system priorities along the Southwest Border, which include new primary and secondary border wall systems, waterborne barrier systems, and barrier attributes where wall is currently installed but barrier attributes – such as lighting, roads, and technology – are needed to complete the barrier system. More than 85 miles of new border barrier system is already in various stages of planning and construction, to include 17 miles of waterborne barrier. In addition, CBP is working with DoD and the Texas National Guard to deploy temporary barriers such as concertina and other razor wire, chain link fencing, and Normandy-style barriers.

Securing and Facilitating Trade and Travel

At our nation's 328 land, air, and sea POEs and our 10 Centers of Excellence and Expertise, as well as our preclearance and pre-inspection locations around the world, CBP prevents dangerous people and contraband from entering the United States, while facilitating the lawful flow of international trade and travel. Our operations incorporate a combination of personnel, technology, intelligence, information, targeting, and international cooperation.

CBP's trade enforcement and facilitation roles are critical to our nation's economic security. We continue to implement an approach that ensures a fair and competitive trade environment, where the benefits of trade compliance exceed the costly consequences of violating U.S. trade law. CBP was ready to immediately enforce new tariffs, including President Trump's April 2, 2025, national emergency proclamation regarding fair trade,¹⁰ with every tool at our disposal, including updating the Automated Commercial Environment, performing targeted inspections, reviewing tariff filings, and providing clear field guidance to frontline officers and revenue specialists. Since January 20, 2025, CBP has successfully implemented 21 tariff-related presidential actions¹¹ collecting more than \$32 billion in tariff-related revenue. In Antidumping and Countervailing Duties (AD/CVD) revenue collection, CBP secured \$7.6 billion in additional revenue as a result of targeted reviews of shipments that were detected as discrepant for Antidumping and Countervailing Duties payment. CBP also secured \$5.5 million in additional revenue as a result of targeted reviews of 601 shipments for undervaluation, misclassification, and other indicators of duty evasion.

With the strong support of this Subcommittee, CBP ensures that Automated Commercial Environment – the system through which all U.S. import and export data are reported – remains highly reliable and available. Like any complex system, updates and enhancements are needed to improve efficiency and prevent interruptions, and we look forward to working with Congress to ensure Automated Commercial Environment is appropriately funded. Utilizing the funds

⁹ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-awards-first-border-wall-contract-president-trumps-second-term>

¹⁰ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/04/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-declares-national-emergency-to-increase-our-competitive-edge-protect-our-sovereignty-and-strengthen-our-national-and-economic-security/>

¹¹ As of April 25, 2025.

provided by Congress for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2025, CBP has been able to allocate \$189 million for Automated Commercial Environment modernization and updates.

In addition to tariff implementation, CBP continues to enforce all U.S. trade laws, including those that protect consumers and aim to eradicate forced labor from supply chains. For example, in March, CBP stopped 435 shipments valued at more than \$2.8 million for further examination of suspected forced labor violations. Shipments suspected of forced labor may be subject to a Withhold Release Order, Forced Labor Finding, or the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act's rebuttable presumption, and are prohibited from importation in the United States under 19 U.S.C. § 1307. CBP also seizes millions of counterfeit and potentially dangerous products every year. In February alone, CBP seized 1,815 shipments that contained counterfeit goods valued at more than \$525 million had they been genuine.

Conclusion

Although this Administration has managed – in just a matter of weeks – to reduce illegal immigration to historic lows, the more than 60,000 men and women of CBP continue to do difficult work in a complex and dynamic operational environment. With your support, CBP will remain resilient and responsive to any new threats or challenges. We will continue to prioritize investments that strengthen border security and facilitate lawful travel and trade, while enforcing the immigration laws, degrading the threat of transnational criminal organizations and terrorists, and protecting American businesses and workers from unfair foreign competition.

I look forward to your questions.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you for your opening statement.

I am going to defer my questions until later on in the hearing.

So we will now go to the gentlelady from Illinois, Ms. Underwood, for your questions.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you.

Mr. Flores, I want to talk about the northern border and Alaska. I am concerned this administration is leaving us vulnerable in these regions to focus on their preferred narrative of a crisis at the southern border, despite the facts showing otherwise. Just one of many examples: CBP data showed twice as many terrorism-related encounters just at ports of entry on the northern border than the entire southern border.

Beyond a joint narcotics operation, your testimony doesn't discuss the northern border. So can you please share more specifics about how the skinny budget we have seen can possibly support what CBP needs to face evolving threats at the northern border, especially given the recent diversion of resources to the southern one?

Mr. FLORES. Thank you for the question.

So, although our current resources and enforcement posture on the southern border is where we are today and ensuring that we secure that from getting to 100-percent situational awareness and ultimately operational control, we know that we are responsible for all the border in the United States, including land border, our northern border—

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Uh-huh.

Mr. FLORES [continuing]. And our waters, the maritime environment.

So, as we continue to outline resources needed and the support—with the support of this committee, resources that we need in regards to technology, personnel on the northern border as well as our maritime borders to ensure that we have 100-percent situational awareness of what is coming across our borders.

We have technology that we have implemented on the northern border, and we continue to look at new technology that will work on the northern border for us in regards to potential for communications by way of cabling, northern-border cameras that we have there, and enhancing our personnel that is along the northern border to ensure that we are gaining that additional 100-percent situational awareness.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Uh-huh. Okay. Well, given the known challenges of staffing the northern border, I look forward to working with you on the ways that we in Congress can help staff those hard-to-fill locations.

Moving on, I am deeply concerned about a memo that you issued on May 5th that revoked four CBP policies protecting vulnerable people in your custody, including seniors, pregnant women, and kids.

One of the four policies that you revoked was on the processing of pregnant and postpartum non-citizens and infants. That policy is what keeps moms in custody healthy. It doesn't require anything fancy. In fact, I am a nurse, and I can tell you, it is really barely the basics—things like a place to sit or lie down or an extra juice or snack for pregnant and breastfeeding moms.

The only justification in your memo for revoking this policy was that it was, quote, "either obsolete or misaligned with current agency guidance and immigration enforcement priorities."

Now, of course, CBP is fundamentally not built for detention, but there are many situations where detention occurs, sometimes long-term, and it is critical that CBP have high standards in place to protect detainees and personnel.

So tell me, what specifically about juice and seating for detained pregnant and breastfeeding moms is obsolete or misaligned with your current guidance and priorities?

Mr. FLORES. Congresswoman, thank you for the question.

So I would say that, when we have 20,000 people in custody every single day and we have 15,000 people sitting underneath a bridge and we have a couple of hundred large groups sitting in the desert, creating additional mechanisms to sort through those masses to ensure that we are taking care of the vulnerable became absolutely necessary as we sort through that population to make sure that we are expediting care and processing for those individuals that we have either in a facility or out on the border at some location.

Today's numbers, when you look at our custody numbers today, we have anywhere from 500 to 700, 800 individuals in custody.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Uh-huh.

Mr. FLORES. We are seeing less than 300 a day come across our borders. So, with those numbers, we can operationalize and ensure that we are not minimizing the care, that we are taking care of those individuals in our custody. Because in that memo, as well, I emphasized that the priority of taking care of individuals in our custody remains a priority for us.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Right.

Mr. FLORES. So our ability to be able to get through, care for, and meet all the requirements of those in our custody, based on 500 or 800 individuals being in our custody, right, we are able to meet those needs and be able to meet—

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Right. But, Mr. Commissioner, you know, if you remove the standards of care that offer baseline, basic criteria for how to care for a vulnerable population like a pregnant person and that would direct your agents and officers to offer that individual juice or a snack or a place to sit, if we are not issuing that as basic policy, then it might not happen.

And so I appreciate that encounters are down. And that is a fantastic thing. That is something that this committee celebrates, in fact. But, as you have reaffirmed, you do have a baseline standard for caring for people in your custody.

And so what I am going to ask is that you commit to immediately reinstating this policy or a new one—or a new one—that reflects the current dynamic with lower levels of encounters that would have higher standards for pregnant and postpartum moms.

Will you commit to that?

Mr. FLORES. So I can definitely take that back, Congresswoman, as we look through this.

So what I would tell you is that, when we do have 20,000 people in custody, it was difficult to find space to allow that to occur. So

we had to prioritize that in order to allow that to occur, to find a place to sit, to get juice or snacks.

And we are still doing the same thing; it is just, we do not have the space limitations today in our facilities to find a place to allow someone to sit or to have juice or to have those snacks.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Mr. Chairman, you know, I think that this committee would be willing to find the resources to properly care for pregnant moms, postpartum moms, kids, elders that are in CBP's care. And I am going to continue to impress upon the agency the urgency of reinstating this type of policy. It is not optional.

And I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you.

We now go to the gentlelady from Iowa, which represents the home of the river buoy tender Wyacond—

Mrs. HINSON. That is right, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. For your questions for the Acting Commissioner. The floor is yours.

Mrs. HINSON. Yes. And thank you for hearing me out during our Coast Guard hearing yesterday about our need for a new cutter on the Mississippi River.

I understand that you do a lot of great work with U.S. Coast Guard, and you talked about some of the introductions already. So I just want to extend my sincere gratitude to you and the men and women at CBP for all of the work you do to not only care for those individuals, as was just discussed in the last line of questioning, but to really keep our country safe, to stand up to those terrorists, those transnational crime organizations, the traffickers who are taking advantage of those very people every single day.

So thank you for what you are doing to help keep them and all of us safe.

We know, under the Biden administration, every State became a border State, even States like Iowa. We saw those consequences firsthand through fentanyl. We saw those consequences through illegal drugs flooding into our communities, putting American lives, Iowa lives at risk.

So I am grateful to the President for taking that action on day one. I mean, you talked about a 95-percent decrease year over year. That is incredible, to see those numbers shift in the other way. And we know you need the necessary tools, the authorities to be able to execute and do that job.

We didn't need new policy; we needed a new President. And we consistently heard from Border Patrol under the previous administration, you felt your hands were tied. Agents were telling me they didn't feel that they could do their jobs effectively, specifically the jobs that they were trained to do. So I am excited to see a return to core mission here, so thank you for helping to lead that.

President Trump's policies—reinstating Remain in Mexico, changing over the CBP One app to make it the CBP Home app, resuming border wall construction, as you talked about, the barrier construction as well—those are all established and proven tools to really help us to deter illegal immigration and, again, empower our frontline agents to be able to do their jobs.

So which of the Biden-era policy reversals would you say have been most effective in having the greatest impact on enforcement, deterrence, and the safety and morale of your agents and officers?

Mr. FLORES. So I would say, actually enforcing our immigration laws and providing consequences to those that break that law.

So our ability to get out of the processing, caretaking, transportation, a lot of those administrative or non-LEO-type enforcements that we had agents and officers doing on a regular and reoccurring basis. We are able now to get them to do law-enforcement-type work, to patrol the border, to create deterrence, to make those arrests, have time to interview aliens that we are encountering and develop further information and intelligence in order to continue prosecutions and to continue down the road in regards to closing off aspects of the border that were open.

Another piece, I think, that significantly helped us is the inject of equipment, personnel from DOD, being able to have more line of sight, being able to have more technology, to have more coverage on the border, allowing our agents to be able to respond and intercept and actually arrest those individuals crossing our border. So we have seen——

Mrs. HINSON. You are talking, like, automated surveillance in——

Mr. FLORES. Right.

Mrs. HINSON [continuing]. Towers and cameras?

Mr. FLORES. Absolutely. So our automated, autonomous surveillance towers and that type of technology that we are using across the board today; the increase of what we are doing from aircraft and unmanned aircraft patrols on the border provide additional visibility and reaction time for our agents.

So those have significantly helped in what we are seeing today in those numbers.

The other piece is the consistent messaging for us, not only within what has happening at the border and within the U.S., but to countries that we had seen aliens arrive at our border from. So that messaging, and the messaging, obviously, matches the consequences that are being provided.

Mrs. HINSON. Yeah.

Well, it is very clear, with that reduction in numbers coming across the border and to my colleague's earlier point about making sure people are cared for, you are clearly able to do that, because you have fewer people that you are having in custody. And I think that that is really important, that you can redirect those resources where they need to go. And, again, I think that probably is a good morale booster for the workforce as well.

Can you speak to, a little bit, the broader cost savings from the changes that have been made under the Trump administration? You talk about interdiction, deterrence, being able to use some of these automated technologies like the CBP Home app. How are those efforts helping you to carry out your mission more effectively?

I mean, I remember coming down to my colleague Tony Gonzales's district and seeing those soft-sided facilities that now we don't have to pay for anymore.

Mr. FLORES. Right.

Mrs. HINSON. So how have you been able to really maximize those savings?

Mr. FLORES. So I think the first thing I will start with is being able to get our law enforcement officers back to doing law enforcement work. So we have cut man-hours there in regards to non-law-enforcement work and being able to patrol the border, which makes us more effective and efficient, based on using law enforcement hours for law enforcement work. That would be the first thing I would mention.

The other thing I would say, on the soft-sided facilities—so soft-sided facilities were costing us about \$83 million a month, is what that was costing us. So, with the numbers being significantly lowered, with our in-custody numbers, again, down from 20,000 people every day that we had, individuals in custody, down to 500 to 800 a day, we were able to shut down all of those soft-sided facilities, so saving the American taxpayers \$83 million each month on the cost of that. So being able to do that internally with the resources was a significant savings for the American taxpayer.

I would say that, in regards to the CBP Home app and what we are doing, it is a cost-effective way to allow individuals that are here illegally or undocumented to be able to get back to their home countries on their own. It is cheaper than providing for custody and providing for transportation flights with ICE, who typically does that transportation. So it is a cost-savings mechanism that allows for those in the country to depart on their own terms.

Mrs. HINSON. Well, thank you for the great work you are doing, Acting Commissioner, and appreciate you coming to testify today. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. The floor now for 5 minutes for questioning belongs to the gentleman from the namesake of the Uniroyal Laredo all-terrain tire.

Mr. CUELLAR. Hey. That is very good.

Mr. AMODEI. It is a little—

Mr. CUELLAR. I am impressed.

Mr. AMODEI. Don't anybody think I am giving them an ad.

The floor is yours.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am impressed by that detail.

And, Ranking Member, thank you so much.

I was texting Rodney Scott. He told me to be kind. So, for the record, I will be very kind, Commissioner Flores.

A couple of things. First of all, thank your men and women—blue, green, tan, Air Marine, and all the folks that work for you all. Thank you so much.

I am going to have—my questions are going to be very specified to Laredo, if you don't mind, this time.

Number one, we have the largest checkpoint that needs to be upgraded. I think we already added \$15 million. They are working on the design. But I would like to make sure that you all keep that on budget and on time. And that is one thing we need to work on, everything else that you all work on, on budget and on time. And hopefully we can follow the law on that aspect.

And I am worried about that checkpoint, because it would be the fourth-largest port of entry if it would be a port of entry, that checkpoint. And it is not only that checkpoint, but we have another one in Freer that has been on hold for a while, and we need that one too. And then I think Congressman Gonzales has another one in Eagle Pass, I believe, also.

So, if we are going to add money, if you all are going to be adding money on reconciliation, just look at the basic needs for our men and women down there, and I will talk about those checkpoints.

The other thing is the efficiencies. I know we just established a CTPAT in Laredo, an office there. You know, the more of those trucking lines we can get in, the better it is, because, as you know, most of the drugs come in through ports of entry, not in between ports. According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, 86 percent of the people that are caught at checkpoints and ports of entry are U.S. citizens, not illegal; they are U.S. citizens or residents. So we have to make sure we get your technology working.

So we have to get that non-intrusive technology working. And I know sometimes the footprint is not there for some of the older bridges, but there are some new expansions coming in—the World Trade Bridge in Laredo, which is the largest port in the whole country, bigger than L.A. And—et cetera, et cetera. We only have 8 lanes, but we got the Presidential permit where we go from 8 to 18 lanes. So, from 18,000 trailers a day—you can imagine what is going to happen. That gives a lot of opportunities for the bad guys to use those trailers.

We have the third-largest crossing, the Colombia Bridge, which we are waiting for a Presidential permit. It is the second-largest in Texas. So Laredo has, basically, number one and number three in the whole southern border. So I am very interested in the men and women in blue and the technology that you all are looking at.

And, finally, the last thing—I want to make a comment, and you can respond—is the cameras. As you know, FAA—somebody came up with a bright idea to put it all together, and the FAA was handling the maintenance. That is like asking Border Patrol to go on air traffics. And I think hopefully that was changed now.

But, in my area, one-third of the cameras are working, two-thirds are not working, unless those numbers have changed. But to say one-third of the cameras are working—I know we are waiting for upgrades—that is not good for border security.

The last point has to do with contracting. You mentioned, you know, the tents. And those tents, I know some were coming from Rome, New York, and other places. But a lot of it—when the numbers went down—I don't know what the right term is—you all had this “warm” status—you all should have gotten rid of that. Because we are paying millions and millions and millions of taxpayers' dollars. And you all just have to do a better job at contracting and getting a better deal and then just letting those—whatever it is—“warm” status—going into that.

And talking about “worm,” let me go to “worm” farm. There is a big detention center in Laredo, \$280 million—I call it a “woke”-type project—where, for the sewage, you all wanted to use “worm.” Apparently you all used it in California. That is fine in California,

but the city of Laredo is willing to put in sewage lines and work with you.

This, I will call it a “woke” project—I mean, just that “worm” thing—the rest is good; the detention center is good—but I would like to have a followup on all that.

Mr. FLORES. Sure.

Mr. CUELLAR. And I know we don’t have enough time, but I would be happy to sit down with you.

And, for the record, tell Mr. Scott that I was very kind to you, I was very kind.

Mr. FLORES. Congressman, thank you for the question. We will definitely get back to you.

We recognize all those projects. They are on our priority. And, obviously, as we get through ability to fund any of that—and some are already funded, in regards to the Laredo checkpoint. So we are on track with that going forward.

Mr. CUELLAR. And the detention center? What about that “warm”——

Mr. FLORES. So the “worm” status that we put them in is because of the unpredictability that we had during the surges that we were seeing from illegal crossings. So we wanted to make sure that we were not going to be out of capacity.

With the new administration and the numbers that we saw consistently being down, we went through the process as soon as we could in order to scale down, and every one of those soft-sided facilities we no longer operate.

Mr. CUELLAR. Yeah. Well, this is a hard facility. They closed the tents, and there we are talking about a hard facility.

Mr. FLORES. Right.

Mr. CUELLAR. Your congressional affairs person is very familiar with that.

I just—I don’t have a problem, and I support that detention center. I just have a problem with the “worm” farm when the city is willing to connect sewage lines to you all.

Mr. FLORES. Okay.

Mr. CUELLAR. But, anyway, thank you so much, and I appreciate your service and the men and women that work for you all.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. AMODEI. Yes, sir.

The chair now recognizes the vice chair of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Arizona, home of the five C’s: copper, cattle, cotton, citrus, and climate.

Mr. Ciscomani, the floor is yours for 5 minutes.

Mr. CISCOMANI. You are really doing a great job today, Chairman. All the personalized——

Mr. AMODEI. I am exhausted. But go right ahead.

Mr. CISCOMANI. It is great. It is great. Thank you.

Acting Commissioner, thank you for being here with us today, and thank you for your leadership in this very important issue to the entire Nation.

I represent Arizona’s Sixth Congressional District. It is in the southeastern part of the State, so—and the border with Mexico. I

have had the opportunity to visit countless times with your OFO officers, with the CBP agents, and the AML agents as well, and I am always very impressed with their great—even through the hardest times in the last few years, just how they were able to show up and keep doing the job in spite of everything else going on. So I have a lot of pride in representing them in Congress. I have a large number of them in my district, living in my district.

So I want to ask a question here on an issue, on the FERS issue that we are seeing. It is my understanding that Federal law enforcement officers face mandatory retirement at age 57, which we know, but can retire earlier if they have 20 years in service and are over 50, or even younger if they have 25 years of service.

This applies for law enforcement under CBP, correct?

Mr. FLORES. Correct.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Okay. And how many CBP personnel do you have who are eligible for retirement today? And how many will be eligible in the next couple of years?

Mr. FLORES. So, just on the retirement issue, I will just start with, you are correct in regards to—so we have officers, agents, any of the CBP law enforcement personnel. So at the age of 50 with 20 years' worth of service can retire and at any age with 25 years of service—

Mr. CISCOMANI. Uh-huh.

Mr. FLORES [continuing]. Can retire in regards to if they are a LEO.

In regards to our numbers of retirement, so we look at—CBP has currently a little over 67,000 employees in CBP right now. If we look at our current number of those eligible to retire, we are somewhere right about 5,900 employees that are eligible to retire. Within that 5,900 that are eligible to retire, we have another 3,300 of those that are LEOs, or law enforcement, that are eligible for retirement.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Great. Thank you for that.

And under the Federal Employee Retirement System that I mentioned, Federal law enforcement officers receive a supplement to their annuity when they retire to bridge them until they become eligible for Social Security at age 62.

Our colleagues on the House Oversight Committee recently reported out legislation as part of the reconciliation process that would have required a Federal law enforcement officer to work until they are 57 to receive this supplement.

I have a huge Border Patrol presence in my district, as I mentioned earlier, and I personally know agents who, because of injuries, really struggle to make it to retirement eligibility, let alone the mandatory retirement age of 57.

Specifically, when I have gone over on the far remote areas of the border and I realize the terrain that these agents are going up and down—and I have heard stories of how their knees give out, you know, in their 40s sometimes, and even earlier, and the injuries that they have.

The Arizona border is a very unique border, as you know, in the southern part there, because of, again, the terrain. In some areas, you can't even build a barrier because of that. It is very different than some of the other neighboring States.

So, anecdotally, I have heard from these agents and their retirement papers right now that they are putting in because they fear that they will not be able to physically make it to the age of 57, which is because of what I just described as well.

So is this something that you are tracking with the men and women working in your department? And how might this provision removing supplemental pay impact your agency and also your recruitment efforts and retainment efforts?

Mr. FLORES. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

So we track retirements on a regular basis on what we are seeing in regards to employees putting in for retirement. In regards to anything that is added or taken away, obviously, Congress will have that input on what happens next, on whether or not any of the language—or what that language looks like, in reconciliation or anywhere else.

I can tell you from my personal experience, anytime we have or there is discussion about potential impacts to employees' pay or benefits, there is some impact to that, in regards to—at least our current employees, right? When we start talking about impacts to current employees' benefits and pay, there is some impact and concern from our existing employees.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Well, I go back to my district every weekend, spend a lot of time out and about, from on the field at football games or at the grocery store or church. And every time I, right now, am talking to someone in Federal law enforcement, this is the number-one issue on their mind, what we are working on here.

So it is something that we are addressing, and I wanted to make sure what your thoughts were on that in terms, again, of the recruiting part but also in the retention right now, given the numbers that you have and the ones that are eligible for retirement. This is a time that we need our workforce, and our experienced workforce, to be on this. And that is why I think it is important to fix that, and we will.

So thank you, sir, for being here, and thank you for your testimony today.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from “aloha” country, since we are talking about new States these days, not that it is exactly new, but the 50th State. At least some people believe that.

The floor is yours for 5 minutes.

Mr. CASE. I don't know how to respond to that, actually. I have got some witty comments having to do with the 51st State, but I think I will just pass.

Mr. AMODEI. I figured you would, which is why I tried to defer to you.

Mr. CASE. Thanks for beating me.

Mr. Flores, first of all, thanks for your service. I think I counted 37 years or so?

Mr. FLORES. Correct.

Mr. CASE. So you have been on the front line for a long time. Appreciate your stepping into this role.

What I want to do is follow up on a line of questioning that I had with the Secretary when she testified about the cost-benefit of a border wall.

And let me give you some context. First of all, I have been to the border three times myself. I have talked with many, many of your officers on the ground. I believe, and I believe it may be the consensus of some of the officers on the ground, that we definitely need to rehabilitate, expand, and extend the border wall in some parts but not all 1,954 miles. I am not going to speak for them, but that is my conclusion.

So what I am interested in is understanding where the administration is trying to go and what are the consequences of doing that.

So my understanding is that, in fiscal year 2024, continued to 2025, Customs and Border Protection was funded at about \$19.6 billion. The skinny budget doesn't specifically call out CBP, but it is a level-funded budget, and I don't think that there is an assumption of an increase for CBP in the skinny budget.

But reconciliation clearly front-loads CBP to the tune of about \$64.9 billion, which is three times more than the annual funding, of which \$46.5 billion is to build the border wall. So that means that, of the entire reconciliation budget, 71.6 percent is allocated to a border wall in the CBP, which is twice the annual budget of all of CBP, as contrasted with \$2.8 billion to border surveillance, which I think we would all agree is also an important part of actually securing our border.

So my question to Secretary Noem was this: That is a heck of a lot of money to put into a border wall, and if we have seen such a drastic decrease in entries into this country—which is good news, by the way. Congratulations to everybody that pulled that off. But if we have got this under control from a non-1,954-mile border wall, then why are we investing that much in a border wall?

So the subsidiary part of the question is, does that \$46.5 billion assume—what is the assumption under that? How much wall does that buy, \$46.5 billion?

Mr. FLORES. So, Congressman, thank you for the question.

So, within CBP, in our evaluation, we have recognized needs in regards to expanding border walls—and not just the border wall; the border wall system.

So infrastructure is one thing. When you talk about infrastructure, an actual physical infrastructure, a wall. When you talk about border roads and access roads, it would become equally as important.

But the border wall system also includes technology. So that means we are talking about fiberoptic cable, we are talking about sensors, we are talking about cameras, autonomous cameras and that, all combining together to systemize just a border wall system in what we are doing.

So what we have planned for in regards to needs that we have, so based on support from the committee, operationalizing what some of those needs are in regards to border wall, border barrier, both the primary wall and secondary wall——

Mr. CASE. Okay.

Mr. FLORES [continuing]. But it includes the technology as well.

Mr. CASE. All right. Cool. And I am fine with all your technology, and I am fine with all of that, you know, border roads, and I am fine with everything else in terms of, you know, taking care of our agents.

But I guess my specific question is, what is the assumption as to a physical barrier, an extension of that barrier? Because \$46.5 billion is a lot of money to spend when, you know, the administration says that it has solved the problem already.

So my question is, from a cost-benefit perspective, what assumption are we making with the border wall in that \$46.5 billion? The wall itself.

Mr. FLORES. So the wall itself, we recognize the operational need and the funding in order to build the—we don't have the funding for that. We have used our current funding in order to build the current wall that we have, either in some type of planning or construction phase—

Mr. CASE. I don't mean to—I am really trying to get to, how much wall did you put into your projections of \$46.5 billion? What is the assumption there? Is that the entire border? Is it half the border?

Mr. FLORES. So it will not include the entirety of the border. So we have a little less than 2,000 miles along the border. So we recognize that there are areas, geographic areas, and terrain out there where a border wall does not make sense for us.

Mr. CASE. Do you know how many of those miles you are assuming in that 46.5 billion number?

Mr. FLORES. So, in regards to primary border barrier, I can tell you that our operational need of what we have identified from a primary border barrier, we are at about 700 miles of primary border.

Mr. CASE. Okay. So that is the assumption in the 46.5—

Mr. FLORES. That is what we have in our planning so far, operational need.

Mr. CASE. And, just quickly, what timeframe does that assume?

Because what you are doing is you are committing this Appropriations Committee to funding of that over time, which takes out of the other goals, which is why reconciliation in budgeting is a bad idea.

What is the timeframe? Ten years?

Mr. FLORES. So what we have right now is just the planning stage of what our operational needs are. Based on whether or not funding is provided, when we get the funding, we will determine what the timeframe is there. But we are working to shorten that timeframe as much as possible.

Mr. CASE. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. AMODEI. The gentleman yield backs.

I now recognize the gentleman from the State whose name, I guess, means “friendly” in one of the Native languages and, obviously, the Lone Star State.

Mr. Gonzales, the floor is yours for 5 minutes.

Mr. GONZALES. Thank you, Chairman.

And, Pete, great to see you here. You have done a great job as Commissioner. Thank you and the men and women that work underneath you, or alongside you, for everything that you are doing.

I want to start with, you know, my district. I have four sectors in it. I have a small piece of Laredo, Del Rio Sector, Big Bend Sector, and El Paso Sector. And each one is completely different than the next.

Let's start with the El Paso Sector. I want to bring your attention that at Fort Hancock, the port of entry at Fort Hancock, the hours have been reduced due to COVID-19 and they never got returned. I mean, COVID was 5 years ago, and the hours are still limited because of that.

So my question is, are there any plans—and I understand staffing and you are trying to navigate it all, but it is seriously a safety issue for the residents in Hudspeth County that rely on that port of entry to make their way to Mexico, back and forth.

Do you have any plans to reevaluate our land ports of entry that currently operate under reduced hours, specifically pre-COVID hours?

Mr. FLORES. Congressman, thank you for the question. Good to see you again.

Absolutely. So we do a continuous evaluation of what our operational tempo is and what our hours are at all the locations that we do, the 328 ports of entry that we have. So we want to make sure, from an operation tempo, that we are meeting the demand of what is happening at our ports of entry. So we do that evaluation, and we consistently reevaluate whether or not the hours meet the demand and needs of what we have.

What we do recognize is that, based on limited staffing and resources, we have to put our staffing to where the need is and then scale down operations as best as possible in order to ensure that we are taking care of needs across the board but ensuring that staff is dedicated to primary locations where we are seeing the need for increased traffic.

But we do reevaluate consistently on what port hours should be.

Mr. GONZALES. Sure. I would ask you to take a look at the Fort Hancock port of entry. Hudspeth County often gets forgotten for a lot of different reasons, and that is an important issue for me.

I want to talk about Stonegarden. Stonegarden, I think, is a program that has been very successful. You know, for those of us who voted for the CR last year, we were able to get a variety of different amounts in. I know El Paso County was able to get \$3.7 million. But there is a disparity in some of the grant awardees, right? Other parts of my district—Frio County got 165k, La Salle County got 186k.

All grateful. All good stuff. But as you are going through this—as we were working through the reconciliation process on the homeland authorization side, we put 450—hopefully it stays, but we put \$450 million in there over a 5-year period. I would just ask that you kind of evaluate, make sure that it is going to some of these areas. Because, in many cases, it is these smaller counties that are still getting hit.

And that leads me—actually, before I go into that part, I would also like to hear your thoughts on, a lot of times, that is used for overtime, but equipment is one of the basic necessities of communicating. And in many parts of my district, you just cannot communicate with others.

What are your thoughts on trying to expand the Stonegarden program to maybe just radios or having some things like that? Just would love to get your thoughts on the communication piece to just the problem set along the border.

Mr. FLORES. Congressman, thanks for the question.

Agree, from a Stonegarden—I will start with Stonegarden—perspective there, that it is an important aspect of what we do, with being able to work law enforcement issues with our State and locals in the county.

As we know, I, like some of you, born and raised in a small border town, in Calexico, California, so I understand the need of how small some of the law enforcement is and the support needed. And the ability to communicate becomes essential, like in most situations—regular/routine and emergency situations.

So what we can do, in regards to the request, in regards to Stonegarden, we will look into what that looks like in regards to equipment and communication and what that is.

A lot of those requests that come in are based on the agency themselves, right, the State and local agencies themselves, putting in their operational order on the needs and, kind of, what the co-operation will be on that, on how we meet those needs under Stonegarden.

Mr. GONZALES. Well, I would love to continue to work together with you on modernizing the program. We just can't write blank checks and think it is going to solve itself. Like, how do we make sure that those funds, our taxpayer dollars, are going down to meet the need? And sometimes it is not personnel; sometimes it is equipment, like communications.

My last question is on the Big Bend Sector. I mean, we talk about—these other sectors get a lot of attention, but the Big Bend Sector, in my eyes, is an area that hasn't slowed down, that continues to have a lot of foot traffic on a daily basis. You know, a lot of people are traveling through the desert on that area.

In that area in particular—once again, it is not an easy place to get to, and I understand the population is low. But from a Big Bend Sector, is there anything that we can do to help, you know, some of the local communities?

What I am hearing from my ranchers is just—like, for everyone else, they have gotten relief. That area continues to be a hotbed.

Just in the Big Bend Sector in particular, is there anything that we can do to maybe alleviate some of their high foot traffic?

Mr. FLORES. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

We continue to look at our high-traffic areas and reevaluate that. With the support that we are getting, being able to put agents back to do law enforcement work, the ingestion of technology that we have and refocusing some of that technology, with the help of DOD in the technology, the help of DOD personnel on the border to help close off some of those areas, are all areas that we are focusing on.

So we continue to plan for where we see problem spots or hot areas along the border, and we continue to reevaluate how we are deploying our agents, how we are working with DOD to deploy their personnel, and then what our coverage is in the air in regards to bringing visibility to those problem areas. We continue to work towards 100-percent situational awareness. And that is our plan

right now, to get to that 100-percent situational awareness so we can ensure that we know what is coming across the border.

And then, ultimately, in ensuring that we know what is coming across the border, being able to effect an enforcement action on that. The enforcement and deterrence piece and the consequences seems to have a good deterrence and alleviating some of those hot spots.

Mr. GONZALES. Right.

Well, thank you, Commissioner, for your testimony today. I look forward to continuing to work together.

And, Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you.

The gentlelady from high-altitude Texas, which—we may be the two highest-altitude residents of districts in Congress. I don't know about Mr. Newhouse, but he is not here, so he doesn't count today.

The floor is yours for 5 minutes.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman and Madam Ranking Member.

Commissioner Flores, thank you for being here, and thank you for your service to our country.

I am blessed to represent the beautiful community of El Paso, Texas. And I am a native, born and raised there. I raised my children there. And my constituents recognize the importance of our land ports of entry.

I think, frequently, Congress does not. You know, we get a lot of visitors from across the country who parachute in. They visit the border, take their selfies, leave. When I have folks visit the border, I always include our land ports of entry, because they are key to our commerce, to our national economy.

But what I have heard, long before I was in Congress, from my neighbors, friends, et cetera, who work for CBP is how understaffed our OFO personnel are. And it has been a chronic issue. It precedes my time in Congress, as I mentioned.

And the staffing model, I think, needs to be reconfigured. And we need to think about different things in a new staffing model, including, for example, the El Paso Sector, where one land port of entry is probably about 45 minutes away from another land port of entry. And when you are shifting personnel, we have to take that timing into consideration.

I was so proud to have supported the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which had funding for a port modernization, the Bridge of the Americas, in the central part of my community. And as we increase POV traffic there, I again come back to thinking about staffing.

And, again, Congress frequently focuses on Border Patrol and the border when it comes to CBP. I would like to hear from you, how do we address our chronic understaffing with OFO?

Mr. FLORES. Congresswoman, thank you for the question.

So our Workload Staffing Model is something we have developed now over several years, and it has been validated. I think, to your point, in regards to taking into consideration the time and distance of some of our locations, it is an important aspect and something that we are trying to ensure that is—it is incorporated into the Workload Staffing Model.

The current Workload Staffing Model for OFO, at least the last numbers I saw, I believe, had them 5,000 people short based on current workload the last time we did the assessment. So it is a validation tool for us on what the workload is.

So I agree that, operationally, like the Border Patrol, Office of Field Operations is also short of the men and women performing the job at the ports of entry.

And as you are well aware, in regards to the economics of what happens at ports of entry in regards to daily travel, commuter travel, commercial trucks coming across the border, right, there is high value in what that is coming across the border.

We continue to make process improvements. With your support and the committee support, in regards to what additional staffing looks like, we continue to make operational improvements to help alleviate some of the stress of points of entry.

In regards to technology as a way forward, Simplified Entry was a great example of what we did in regards to being able to expedite traffic. As we look at Trusted Traveler and Trusted Trader programs, we have FAST, and we have Global Entry, right, we have SENTRI and those type of programs that, today, account for about 16 million people registered into those type of programs.

So I am trying to expedite crossings across the border as we wait for additional staffing, hopefully, and funding for that to be able to fulfill some of those spots that we have both in the passenger environment and in the cargo environment along all of our ports of entry in the U.S.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Commissioner, would you commit to working with me on assuring that we have enough OFO personnel at our land ports of entry?

Mr. FLORES. Will do. Yes. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Okay. Perfect.

I would also like to work with you on Trusted Traveler, because that is a high source of complaints from members of my community, including very well-respected members of the business community, to, you know, all sorts of folks from all walks of life. That program, when that privilege is revoked, it is like a black box; people can't get answers. So I would like to work with you on that as well.

I am running out of time. I have one final question that is really important to me.

We have seen the administration use members of our Active-Duty military on the U.S.-Mexico border. How much training and how long is the training for Border Patrol, just very quickly, before they engage in border operations?

Mr. FLORES. So the academy itself, I believe it is about 6 months.

Ms. ESCOBAR. And they get all sorts of really in-depth training.

How much training do our Active-Duty military get before they are put on border enforcement? Do you know?

Mr. FLORES. So I would have to leave that up to DOD. But I know, based on my experience over my career, we have had DOD at the border ever since I can remember in regards to—

Ms. ESCOBAR. Well, aside from the joint task force, I am talking about the recent operations—

Mr. FLORES. Right.

Ms. ESCOBAR [continuing]. Where we are literally putting military personnel on the border to act as enforcement personnel. Do you know how much training they get?

Mr. FLORES. So we do some cross-training with DOD personnel when they come on board in regards to relationship of what we are doing. And then they obviously—DOD does their own training before that. But I don't—

Ms. ESCOBAR. And do you know how—

Mr. FLORES [continuing]. I don't know how much training DOD does.

Ms. ESCOBAR. It is literally only hours, a few hours.

And so I need to publicly express again my profound concern and alarm at the administration's decision to use military assets, military installations, and now Active-Duty military for border enforcement.

So thank you so much. Again, look forward to working with you on Trusted Traveler and on ensuring that we have an adequate number of OFO personnel at our land ports.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. The gentleman from the Great River State, which I guess is translated out of the Algonquian language for "Mississippi," and also known as the Magnolia State, the floor is yours for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Commissioner, thank you for joining us. Thank you for your hard work. Thank you for your leadership. Please tell the men and women who serve under you how much we, as Congress, appreciate what they do for us each and every day.

I want to tell you that the work that CBP has been able to do in the last few months has been amazing. We have seen a dramatic change along the border. We have seen numbers drop to historic lows, decreases of 90-plus percent along the southwest border.

And I think that goes to show the hard work of the men and women that serve under you and the change that we have seen in the administration of actually allowing them to do their job and to enforce the laws that exist.

There was a question by one of my colleagues earlier about walls and borders, and why do we need walls, why do we need borders if the—physical borders along our southwest border if, in fact, we have reached the point that we have today where things are fairly secure?

But I want to ask you: In your experience, do walls work? Are they a necessary part of the border component that Congress should be investing in?

And in those areas where we have walls or borders, do we see that we are able to redirect manpower to other areas of the border that have not been secured by those structures?

Mr. FLORES. Congressman, thank you for the question.

So I started my career about 37 years ago in a small border town of Calexico, California. So, for 30-plus years, we have been using some type of border barrier along the border. And so, in my experience, infrastructure, border barriers, walls, technology—it works.

It provides us a couple things. One, it provides us situational awareness in regards to, when you talk about barriers and tech-

nology, it provides us with greater situational awareness, which creates the ability for our agents and officers to respond to any event or event that may be occurring.

The wall also provides us—more hours back in regards to it provides agents the capability to patrol and enforce more mileage along the border in regards to access roads and the wall doing—to prevent and denial of individuals crossing at various locations along the southwest border.

The other thing, it provides us space, it provides us some time, in regards to our agents to be able to respond to an area before somebody who crossed illegally disappears into an urban area, into a vehicle, or other locations before we are able to get them. So it provides that ability.

So it is a cost-saving measure not only for us. It increases our enforcement and our ability to respond and react and actually encounter individuals that are illegally crossing.

The other thing that I have personally seen, again, most of my career being on the southwest border: When you create a safer environment based on infrastructure and technology, that allows for border communities to grow and infrastructure to grow. Business and developments, housing developments, and all those things seem to flourish in those areas where you have a more secure border.

Mr. GUEST. And let me ask you a little bit about the Air and Marine Operations, the AMO. I know that, in some instances, our AMO pilots are operating light enforcement platforms, helicopters that in some cases are decades old. They are well-maintained, but they are coming to the end of that lifecycle.

And so I want to ask you how important it is for Congress to begin planning and to begin funding the replacement for these aging airframes.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you for the question.

That is a critical component of our strategy on how we, in fact, get 100-percent situational awareness along the border. Having light enforcement aircraft in that strategy is an important aspect.

We appreciate the funding provided to CBP so far in regards to being able to maintain our current fleet. The fiscal year 2025 budget had the inclusion of two additional of the light enforcement aircraft, so we appreciate that. And we look forward to the additional funding to be able to grow and recapitalize some of the aging fleet there.

Mr. GUEST. And, just very briefly, as it relates to the non-intrusive inspection systems that we have installed along the border there, particularly at the ports of entry, we have seen that the roll-out of this technology, I think, has been, let's just say, less than ideal. The screening percentage particularly of passenger vehicles remains disappointing.

And I know Congress will continue to invest in that technology, but I just want to implore you, as you are serving in this acting position, to do everything that we can to see that these systems are installed, that they are brought on line, that the men and women who are operating the systems are trained, so that we can continue to screen more traffic that is coming across the border.

We know that that technology serves as a force multiplier and will help us be able to better secure the border and particularly stop the flow of narcotics from coming into the country.

And so, with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Acting Director, I have a few questions before we wrap up.

How is the Home application to leave—the State Department gives somebody 1,000 bucks—do we have any preliminary data on how that is working? Are people signing up for that? What?

Mr. FLORES. So we do have some preliminary data that we do have individuals signing up for that in order to take that.

That very specific piece, although we built that application, it is being run by ICE in regards to getting that through, and the Department, in regards to applicants and that process.

Mr. AMODEI. Okay. So if you could have your folks just kind of get back to us. And it is not a trick question. I am just kind of curious—

Mr. FLORES. Right.

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. How is that working?

So some of the members have talked to you about funding for the wall. And I know that people tend to—“Well, it is the wall.” And it is like, “Well, there is more than that.”

But do you have any ideas on—so are we kicked off on that? All aspects? Fiber-optic? The actual wall itself? Roads? Blah, blah, blah. Is that all kicked off as we speak? And if it is not, when do we expect to be fully underway on multiple assets of what people colloquially refer to as “the wall”?

Mr. FLORES. Yeah. So the wall system, in regards to not only infrastructure but the technology that applies to that, so, based on our current funding, yes, we are making sure that, as we implement new wall, it is a wall system in regards to fiber-optic and sensors. So that is in our current planning that we have.

In regards to additional funding that we may receive, we are planning to ensure that it is a wall system in regards to not only infrastructure but technology that goes along with that, along with border roads, access points, where we may have the opportunity to build more wall based on appropriations.

Mr. AMODEI. Are we building as we speak?

Mr. FLORES. We are building as we speak.

Mr. AMODEI. Generally, what are we building? The whole nine yards?

Mr. FLORES. No. So—

Mr. AMODEI. Cameras? Wiring? Roads? Actual wall?

Mr. FLORES. So the wall, cameras, roads, yes. We are incorporating the technology into the 85-plus miles that we have. As we get into physical border-barrier-type bollard construction, that will be incorporated into every piece of bollard fencing that we build.

Mr. AMODEI. How about buoys in, for instance, the Rio Grande? Are we deploying those, or is that in the planning stage? Or where are we at with buoys?

Mr. FLORES. So we have that in the planning stage right now. We have—I think our latest contract is 17 miles of border barrier buoy that we have contracted for.

Mr. AMODEI. Okay.

The cameras and the FAA thing. We are not doing that again, right?

Mr. FLORES. Right. So we are moving—so we talk about maintenance of older technology. Based on the technology that we have, it is older-type technology. A lot of times, it becomes very difficult to maintain parts, to get parts, in order to make that type of technology operational.

So we do plan to completely update that technology and use new technology to ensure that our cameras are operational and integrated with everything that we are planning for.

Mr. AMODEI. Well, some of the questioning here today has gone to that. And I will just tell you, it is like, I haven't had anybody approach me—if somebody else has been approached—and said, "Hey, what we are doing now with those cameras and having somebody else maintain them is okay-dokey."

And so I guess my question is: We have learned the lessons we need to from that, not that anybody was a bad person or whatever, but that dog ain't huntin'.

Mr. FLORES. Right.

Mr. AMODEI. So, as we go forward with new recapitalization of that particular part of your mission, we are going a different direction?

Mr. FLORES. Right.

Mr. AMODEI. Okay.

The last thing I have is: I have a concern, and I know there are some moving parts to it, but when you keep getting reprogramming requests to move money out of hiring people and moving it into other areas, at some point in time I hope that one of the things we are working on is, we have to change the way we assess and bring people on board, that hiring process.

So I know that—and I am not saying it is yours, but it is other Federal ones, so maybe it is yours. By the time we get done advertising, identifying somebody, putting them through the test, going through all the drill or whatever, it is not unusual to have people say, "Hey, thanks, but I went someplace where I can start working 6 months ago."

Mr. FLORES. Right.

Mr. AMODEI. And so my question is, where are we at in basically rethinking how we assess Border Patrol agents, employees, whatever, so that we quit getting reprogramming requests which basically cannibalize money that—we are like, "Hey, I know you need more people. Here is the money." And it is like, "Well, we can't get them on board fast enough."

At some point in time, you know, it is a credibility thing, where you are like, "Well, we keep putting this money in, but it hasn't been used for that." So it is like, when we give you the money, we want you to bring new people on.

Anybody working on a plan for, this is how we revamp our whole hiring process?

And, by the way, I know some of it is, "Well, you know, we have to go through OMB and their program," or whatever. It is like, "Well, let's triage that, and if we can help you, then good."

Are we doing any of that, hopefully, on—

Mr. FLORES. Congressman—

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. New cameras, new technology, and, oh, by the way, a new program to actually bring these folks on?

Mr. FLORES. Thank you for the question.

And we are.

So we have taken a hard look at what our hiring process is. We have taken a look at where the longest poles in the tents are during that hiring process. And we have taken steps to increase what that is in regards to, from a human-resource side, on what we are doing and how we are doing things and when we are doing certain things, such as physicals and testing and those type of things and how we combine different things in order to shorten up that timeframe.

We are also, in regards to—recognize that when we have applicants and they start through the process, that assigning somebody a recruiter or somebody to help them through the process, we have a higher percentage of yielding onboard rates and shortening that timeframe from application to on board.

So we are increasing what our ability is for recruitment, as we continue to look at what the funding looks like, ensuring that we are having a recruiter attached to applicants that are getting through the process.

We are looking at what the background investigators—the need for background investigators, the need for polygraphs, and what that number looks like and what our bandwidth is there.

So we continue to look at the entirety of that process, down to locations and hard-to-fill locations and what we can do about getting applicants into hard-to-fill locations.

Mr. AMODEI. So the message is clear from the question. It is like, I think you guys have plenty of credibility when you say, “We need 20,000 more people to operate, and retirements, and we expect a surge,” and all that stuff. I get all that.

Now that everybody recognizes that, it is whatever needs to be done, to do that in real-time. Because with each reprogramming request that cannibalizes those funds, it just—it doesn’t look—

Mr. FLORES. Right.

Mr. AMODEI [continuing]. Good in terms of, “Yeah, we heard you, and we are trying to help you,” but the money never ends up getting there because of fundamental flaws in that process.

So thank you for your input, and we will look forward to working on that.

CBP has historically been an excellent partner as we work through the annual appropriations process, and I ask that that continue for fiscal year 2026. We won’t surprise you. Don’t surprise us. It is that simple.

For the get-back questions that members of the subcommittee had today, we ask that you respond in 15 business days. I know you are busy, but this process is moving quickly, and so what I don’t want to do is have the train leave the station and us make assumptions which are not based on factual information.

There may be additional questions members provide in writing, and we ask you to respond to those in a timely manner.

Mr. AMODEI. I would like to thank you again for coming. You have been an excellent witness.

And the subcommittee stands adjourned.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:13 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

CBP – Department of Homeland Security
Thursday, May 15, 2025

Representative Hinson

1. Illicit trade of illegal e-cigarettes

To: Acting Commissioner Flores

Manufacturers based in the People's Republic of China (PRC) import millions of illegal e-cigarettes weekly through our ports of entry. These e-cigarettes are addictive to our children and put the nation's public health at risk. There is ample evidence that these Chinese manufacturers, as well as their domestic importers and customs brokers, are engaged in a large-scale criminal enterprise involving the unlawful smuggling of products to avoid detection and evade tariffs.¹ Recently, the newly appointed FDA Commissioner framed the illegal e-cigarette problem as an illicit import problem and said these bad actors are engaged in "port shopping" and that "they're laughing at us" because the illegal e-cigarettes "all get in."²

Question 1a: What actions are CBP and HSI taking to address this form of illicit trade being perpetrated on a massive scale and to stop these harmful products from getting into the hands of our kids?

Answer: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) views illicit electronic nicotine delivery systems as a significant import safety risk. On May 22, 2025, CBP and the Food and Drug Administration announced seizures of nearly two million units of unauthorized e-cigarette products, with an estimated retail value of \$33.8 million. This was part of a federal operation to examine incoming shipments and prevent illegal e-cigarettes from entering the country. In October 2024, CBP and the Food and Drug Administration announced seizures of illegal e-cigarette products with an estimated retail value of more than \$78 million. We continue to

¹ U.S. Food and Drug Administration, More Than \$7 Million Worth of Illegal E-Cigarettes Seized in Federal Operation, January 10, 2025, <https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/ctp-newsroom/more-7-million-worth-illegal-e-cigarettes-seized-federal-operation>.

² Fox News, Top Trump admin health officials share visions for respective agencies, video, May 8, 2025, <https://www.foxnews.com/video/6372544753112>.

actively pursue enforcement actions against those that illegally import or facilitate the unlawful import of electronic nicotine delivery systems, to include supporting criminal investigations led by our partners at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations.

CBP has been a member of the Multiagency Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems Task Force since July 2024. This task force was created to streamline efforts to combat the significant public health threat posed by the sale of unauthorized products. CBP continues to work with our interagency partners on efforts, guided by task force leadership within the Department of Justice and Food and Drug Administration, to stop illicit electronic nicotine delivery systems from entering the United States.

ICE's Homeland Security Investigations is the principal investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and is responsible for investigating transnational crime and threats, specifically those criminal organizations that exploit the global infrastructure through which international trade, travel, and finance move. CBP and the Food and Drug Administration are responsible for determining the legality of the entry of e-cigarettes at the port of entry. CBP provides information regarding criminal violations to Homeland Security Investigations, which among other duties is responsible for responding to the port of entry. Where a criminal matter meets federal thresholds, Homeland Security Investigations will investigate the case. If the information provided to Homeland Security Investigations does not reach federal prosecutorial thresholds, then CBP and the Food and Drug Administration are responsible for civil and administrative enforcement actions, as appropriate.

Question 1b: Specifically, what resources have been allocated at CBP and HSI to identify and prosecute those engaging in these criminal acts?

Answer: CBP has identified illicit electronic nicotine delivery systems as one of its import safety priority trade issues that can cause significant revenue loss, harm the U.S. economy, or threaten the health and safety of the American people. CBP has dedicated significant resources to electronic nicotine delivery systems enforcement, including spearheading several large-scale joint operations resulting in seizure of millions of illicit devices. Many of these operations are led by CBP's Office of Trade, Commercial Targeting and Analysis Center. Additionally, CBP and Food and Drug Administration personnel are at certain locations, including ports of entry, to conduct coordinated analysis to identify and interdict high-risk shipments. Both agencies employ a combination of industry knowledge, risk analysis, awareness of past violators, and intelligence to identify high-risk shipments for examination.

Homeland Security Investigations's Intellectual Property Unit directly supports and houses the National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center, a whole-of-government law enforcement effort composed of Homeland Security Investigations special agents, intelligence analysts, attorneys, and program managers that support over 30 partners from law enforcement agencies, academia, and global industry. The mission of the National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center team is to ensure national security by protecting the public's health and safety, the U.S. economy, and the war fighters, and to stop predatory and unfair trade practices that threaten the global economy. During Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, the National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center developed over 200 leads that were sent to the

field for further investigation or enforcement actions. In addition, Homeland Security Investigations's Trade Fraud Unit advances Homeland Security Investigations's mission to protect America's borders, national security, and public safety from transnational threats by investigating illicit trade and customs fraud. Among other areas, Homeland Security Investigations's Trade Fraud Unit investigative programs include anti-dumping and countervailing duties, textiles, trade agreements, and general trade fraud.

2. Alignment of Country-of-Origin Standards for Pharmaceuticals Between CBP and FDA

To: Acting Commissioner Flores

There appears to be a discrepancy between how the FDA and CBP determine the country of origin for pharmaceutical products. The FDA defines the country of origin based on where the finished dosage form is manufactured for patient use. However, CBP has in some cases ruled that origin is based on where the Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) is produced—even if that API cannot be consumed by patients and the final manufacturing occurs elsewhere.

This conflicting interpretation has led to situations where products manufactured in China, using API from a Trade Agreements Act (TAA) compliant country, are considered TAA compliant and eligible for sale to the VA and DoD, even though the final product is manufactured in China.

Question 2a: Would CBP consider revisiting its interpretation of “substantial transformation” for pharmaceuticals to align with the FDA’s standard, recognizing the country of origin as where the finished dosage form is manufactured?

Answer: CBP views the application of the substantial transformation criterion as the appropriate standard for determining the country of origin of pharmaceuticals and, therefore, is not inclined to consider revisiting it. As developed by U.S. courts (the earliest case was in 1908)³, substantial transformation is based on a change in name, character, and use. The substantial transformation of a good requires the good to be transformed into a new and different article, having a distinctive name, character, and use. In determining whether a substantial transformation occurs in the manufacture of chemical products such as pharmaceuticals, CBP consistently examines the complexity of the processing and whether the final article retains the essential identity and character of the raw material.

To that end, in cases concerning pharmaceuticals, CBP considers whether the active pharmaceutical ingredient retains its chemical and physical properties as a result of the processing performed and whether the processing changes the medicinal use of the active pharmaceutical ingredient. Thus, if the active pharmaceutical ingredient retains its chemical and physical properties and is merely put into dosage form and packaged for sale, there is no substantial transformation.

In contrast, a standard based solely on the finished dosage form is not guaranteed to put consumers of pharmaceuticals on notice of the origin of the active pharmaceutical ingredient. CBP notes various free trade agreements also do not recognize putting pharmaceuticals up into

³ See Anheuser-Busch Brewing Ass'n v. United States, 207 U.S. 556 (1908).

medicated dosage as conferring originating status. Additionally, the substantial transformation criterion is currently used for the majority of non-preferential origin purposes, including to determine the country of origin for marking, trade remedies, and government procurement. CBP intends to continue to apply the substantial transformation criterion for determining the country of origin of pharmaceuticals, as statute and judicial precedent constrain revisiting its use.

3. Body-Worn Cameras

To: Acting Commissioner Flores

U.S. Border Patrol has deployed over 13,000 body-worn cameras since 2020. During a use-of-force incident, these cameras have helped agents verify their actions and expedite the investigative process, thereby safeguarding CBP and the agents' reputation.

Question 3a: What is CBP's current status of deploying body-worn cameras to all U.S. Border Patrol agents,

Answer: Currently, Incident-Driven Video Recording Systems (CBP's body-worn cameras program) are deployed to 62.2 percent (13,100) U.S. Border Patrol Agents and are used in every U.S. Border Patrol sector. Due to the decrease in the FY 2026 President's Budget, U.S. Border Patrol is not be able to expand the current deployment of body-worn cameras to all remaining (~7,000) U.S. Border Patrol Agents.

Question 3b: and how many agents have been exonerated by body-worn camera footage?

Answer: CBP does not have a system of record that tracks exonerations based on body-worn camera footage. However, National Use of Force Review Board members have routinely commented on the benefits of using body-worn camera footage to support use of force reviews.

Question 3c: What is CBP's plan to expand body-worn cameras to the Office of Field Operations and Air & Marine Operations?

Answer: Due to the decrease in the FY 2026 President's Budget, CBP's Office of Field Operations and Air and Marine Operations would not be able to expand the current deployment of body-worn cameras.

As of May 15, 2025, Office of Field Operations has deployed 197 body-worn cameras to Special Response Team operators. As of May 29, 2025, CBP Air and Marine Operations deployed 146 body-worn cameras across 10 marine units around the country, prioritizing areas and units with higher operational tempos.

If funding is allocated in the future for Incident-Driven Video Recording Systems, the intent for the Office of Field Operations is to move forward to the next phase of deployment to Task Force Officers and non-bargaining unit officers and the intent for Air and Marine Operations is to continue deployment of body worn cameras to all remaining Marine Interdiction agents.

Question 3d: What is CBP's plan to release body-worn camera footage to demonstrate the good work of its agency and support its agents?

Answer: CBP is committed to expeditious release of body-worn camera footage consistent with policy and applicable privacy and legal requirements. As of June 13, 2025, CBP has released 12 videos which are available on its Accountability and Transparency webpage.⁴ Additionally, body-worn camera images are used in social media posts and videos to highlight rescues and other law enforcement actions by CBP officers and agents.

4. cUAS

To: Acting Commissioner Flores

In December 2024, Deputy Executive Assistant Commissioner Keith Jones testified about CBP's counter-unmanned aerial systems (cUAS) efforts. He stated that, "The expanded use of UAS for malicious purposes requires CBP to enhance its domain awareness and detection capabilities to identify and counter these smaller and more agile threats across the border environment." However, over its last three budget requests, CBP has not asked for cUAS funding.

Question 4a: If cUAS is a priority for CBP, will it be included in FY26 budget request for cUAS technologies?

Answer: Yes, the FY 2026 President's Budget request for counter-unmanned aerial systems includes \$1.8 million in Operations for Operations and Support funding and \$5.8 million in Procurement, Construction and Improvements funding aircraft systems.

Question 4b: How has DHS Science & Technology's ownership of cUAS testing, evaluation, and fielding of cUAS technologies for all of DHS impacted CBP's cUAS efforts?

Answer: The majority of such work conducted by DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) supports CBP's counter-unmanned aircraft systems program. S&T's focus is on the continued emerging capabilities of unmanned aerial systems and the threat they pose to CBP agents and officers on the borders. This critical work helps steer CBP's counter-unmanned aerial systems acquisition program office in selecting the appropriate counter-unmanned aerial systems to respond to the evolving threat.

5. sUAS

To: Acting Commissioner Flores

Small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS) are increasingly being used by state & local agencies as a "first responder" to offer real-time situational awareness and reduce response times. At the border where a single agent may be patrolling by themselves, sUAS should be a critical capability for United States Customs and Border Protection.

⁴ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/accountability-and-transparency> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/accountability-and-transparency/body-worn-camera-video-releases>.

Question 5a: What is CBP's plan for equipping more agents at the border with sUAS systems?

Answer: CBP deploys small unmanned aerial systems to maximize the efficiency of human-machine interaction and the efficacy of the world's latest innovative solutions in pursuit of "100 percent real-time detection and identification of illegal border crossings, ensuring we can apprehend every unauthorized entry." The program will continue to use any allotted funding to outfit and replenish field assets, train personnel, and seek out cutting edge small unmanned aerial systems technology for resolution of threats.

Question 5b: What operational or policy challenges are delaying sUAS and tethered drone adoption and usage?

Answer: CBP faces several challenges with regard to small unmanned aerial systems deployment that are not specific to only tethered small unmanned aerial systems. These challenges are typically interconnected and include operational, policy/legal, budgetary, as well as the available technology that is compliant with the National Defense Authorization Act requirements. Safe operation of advanced small unmanned aerial systems along the border is difficult due to limited line of sight, spotty telecommunications and Global Positioning Satellite coverage, as well as support infrastructure such as ground based radar, required to operate over expansive austere terrain. CBP small unmanned aerial systems pilots operate in increasingly congested airspace and in an environment with adversaries that use jamming capabilities without regard for the law or safety of the people in the National Airspace System or otherwise. The Federal Aviation Administration has historically been a great partner to help CBP achieve its mission while balancing the needs of other users of the National Airspace System.

Question 5c: Tethered drones can be a cost effective alternative to surveillance towers. How will CBP incorporate tethered drones into its UAS portfolio?

Answer: CBP submitted a new request for information to industry specifically on tethered Small unmanned aerial systems in FY 2025 and is actively attending technology demonstrations which may proceed to the testing and evaluation phase. CBP evaluated tethered systems in prior years; however, the available technology proved unreliable and was inconsistent with mission requirements.

Industry solutions of tethered drone systems are being re-investigated to determine whether the increases in surveillance persistence offer payback for the U.S. Border Patrol mission. Being quickly relocatable, these systems offer a capability that provides more persistence than stand alone drone systems. Initial indications are that tethered drones add value to the program. Tethered solutions could be used to fill gaps where towers cannot be employed due to land agreements, austere locations, or inaccessibility. CBP is instead exploring numerous types of small unmanned aerial systems technologies, to include tethered solutions, to address its diverse operational environment. These technologies are intended to integrate with numerous other sensors, technology, and infrastructure to address vulnerability gaps by providing real-time detection, identification, and tracking.

Representative DeLauro

6. Updated data on *de minimis* shipments

To: Acting Commissioner Pete Flores

Question 6a: Between May 1, 2024 and May 2, 2025, what percentage of *de minimis* shipments were from China and how many packages were entering the United States per week from China?

Answer: Between May 1, 2024 and May 2, 2025, 74 percent of *de minimis* shipments entering the United States were products of China and Hong Kong. During this time period, more than 15.6 million shipments entered the United States from China per week.

Question 6b: In the weeks following the May 2 effective date of the EOs, how many packages valued under \$800 that would have previously qualified for *de minimis* treatment arrived from China?

Answer: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) estimates that between May 2, 2025 and May 27, 2025, approximately 50.4 million shipments that would have previously qualified for the *de minimis* administrative exemption arrived from China based on an analysis of total entry lines filed for shipments valued at \$800 or less.

Question 6c: Between May 1, 2024 and May 2, 2025, what percentage of *de minimis* shipments from China and what number per week were conveyed to the United States by each of the following means: express delivery, air cargo, international postal, or another means?

Answer: Between May 1, 2024, and May 2, 2025, 74 percent of *de minimis* shipments entering the United States were products of China and Hong Kong. *De minimis* shipments from China and Hong Kong per week by conveyance during this time period were as follows:

- Air cargo – 21.1 million
- Truck cargo – 1.1 million
- Vessel cargo – 216,258
- Express delivery – 2.06 million
- International postal – 365,500

Question 6d: After May 2, what percentage of shipments from China that would previously have qualified for *de minimis* treatment and what number per week were conveyed to the United States by each of the following means: express delivery, air cargo, international postal or another means?

Answer: Between May 2, 2025, and May 27, 2025, the shipments from China and Hong Kong that CBP estimates would have previously qualified for the *de minimis* exemption were as follows:

- Air cargo – 13.5 million

- Truck cargo – 280,000
- Vessel cargo – 253,000
- Express delivery – 370,000
- International postal – 9,150

Question 6e: Between May 1, 2024 and May 2, 2025, what percentage of *de minimis* shipments were from China were inspected before release and how many packages per week from China were inspected?

Answer: CBP is unable to provide this data for Law Enforcement Sensitive issues; however, we can provide a briefing, as requested, on our enforcement efforts.

Question 6f: In the weeks following the May 2 effective date of the EOs, what percentage and how many packages valued under \$800 from China that would previously have qualified for *de minimis* treatment have been inspected?

Answer: CBP is unable to provide this data for Law Enforcement Sensitive issues; however, we can provide a briefing, as requested, on our enforcement efforts.

7. *De minimis* shipments from China

To: Acting Commissioner Pete Flores

I have raised concerns for years about the dangers of allowing millions of low-value shipments to enter the United States every day under *de minimis* treatment. This loophole has been exploited by e-commerce giants and foreign companies to undercut U.S. manufacturers, costing jobs in critical sectors, and to smuggle in fentanyl, precursor chemicals, and related implements, contributing to the broader opioid epidemic and causing deaths.

I was glad to see the administration's executive orders (EO) ending *de minimis* treatment for packages from China, where the bulk of these shipments originate. However, this executive order will not be able to address the problem without sufficient enforcement.

Question 7a: Will Customs and Border Protection (CBP) require 10-digit Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) codes be submitted for all packages coming in under informal entry subject to the orders? If so, on what legal basis will this be enforced?

Answer: Shipments entering as an informal (Type 11) entry are required by regulation to submit a 10-digit Harmonized Tariff Schedule classification. The Automated Commercial Environment will not accept a formal or informal (Type 11) entry that does not contain the Harmonized Tariff Schedule classification.

Question 7b: If so, will CBP publish a communication to this effect in the Federal Register to ensure awareness in the trade community? If not, how does CBP plan to inform importers and carriers of this policy?

Answer: CBP published communications to this effect in the Federal Register. The

Harmonized Tariff Schedule requirement has been a key point of CBP messaging leading up to and since implementation of the *de minimis* restrictions on products from China and Hong Kong. The Federal Register Notice implementing the Executive Order (see [2025-07325 90 Federal Register 17608](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/28/2025-07325/notice-of-implementation-of-additional-duties-on-products-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-pursuant-to-executive-order-14176))⁵, along with CBP messaging to the trade community via the Cargo Systems Messaging Service (see, Cargo Systems Messaging Service #64917563 and #64792502)⁶⁷, contained this guidance. These publications specified that products of China and Hong Kong that would otherwise qualify for the *de minimis* exemption must be entered under an appropriate entry type (e.g., formal or informal) in the Automated Commercial Environment by a party qualified to make entry in accordance with applicable regulations (e.g., 19 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 142 and Code of Federal Regulations 143).

Question 7c: Will carriers be required to fill out CBP Form 7501 for informal entries covered under the EOs? If so, will CBP clarify that 10-digit HTS codes are required for completed submission of Form 7501?

Answer: CBP's regulations for informal entries (other than *de minimis* entries, which are a subset of informal entries), are that the party filing the entry must generally submit a CBP Form 7501 which requires the 10-digit Harmonized Tariff Schedule number of the United States classification (e.g., 19 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 142 and 143), though some exceptions are set forth in the regulations. The parties who may make informal entry are set forth in CBP's regulations (19 Code of Federal Regulations 143.26). CBP made this a key point in messaging the trade community leading up to and following implementation of the *de minimis* restrictions on products of China and Hong Kong.

8. Global *de minimis* shipments

To: Acting Commissioner Pete Flores

I am also glad to see that the administration has pledged to end *de minimis* treatment for low-value packages from *all* countries, not just China. Extending the rules for China (and their robust enforcement) to all countries is particularly important to ensure companies and drug cartels cannot simply transship their goods through a third country to continue qualifying for *de minimis* treatment, as some companies have already indicated they plan to do.

The President has directed the Secretary of Commerce to certify that a process is in place to collect duties and verify information with respect to *de minimis* packages from countries other than China.

Question 8a: Have you engaged with the Department of Commerce about what that mechanism will look like and when it will be stood up?

Answer: CBP engaged in interagency discussions on the expansion of *de minimis* restrictions to other countries. These discussions have included representatives from the Department of

⁵ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/28/2025-07325/notice-of-implementation-of-additional-duties-on-products-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-pursuant-to-executive-order-14176>

⁶ <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDHSCBP/bulletins/3e045a7>

⁷ <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDHSCBP/bulletins/3dca7b6>

Commerce, Department of the Treasury, and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

Question 8b: With USTR?

Answer: Yes, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative has been part of interagency discussions.

Question 8c: How will it differ, if at all, from the process CBP has in place to address former *de minimis* shipments from China?

Answer: CBP defers to the Department of Commerce on specifics regarding the potential expansion of *de minimis* restrictions to other countries.

Question 8d: Are there specific challenges and concerns related to the implementation of ending *de minimis* for all countries that would necessitate changes to, or need to be structured differently from, the procedures established to collect duties and verify information for former *de minimis* shipments from China?

Answer: A key challenge has been how to effectively collect revenue for shipments entering the United States through the international mail. Current regulations for informal mail entry require CBP to manually write a duty ticket and enter it into CBP systems. See 19 Code of Federal Regulations 145.12.⁸ A duty bill is then generated and provided to the United States recipient of the mail parcel. A key challenge of the process resulting from the exclusion of international mail shipments from *de minimis* treatment has been the ability to assess and collect the applicable duty prior to shipment to the United States. This is a process that will require continued refinement and automation to eliminate manual processes for CBP and United States Postal Service personnel and to ensure effective, efficient collection of revenue.

Question 8e: Until the administration acts to end *de minimis* for all low-value packages, how will CBP track *de minimis* trade flows from countries that are at high risk of serving as transshipment venues for low-value packages from China to identify goods from China attempting to cheat the system and skirt the law?

Answer: CBP has robust targeting and analytical processes in place. The agency is actively monitoring *de minimis* volumes and transactions from all countries to identify any potential indicators of transshipment or other trade evasion. CBP's enforcement efforts prioritize the targeting of high-risk shipments at the national and local level, and at ports of entry reviewing and inspecting targeted shipments and taking enforcement actions as appropriate.

Question 8f: Which countries have seen their *de minimis* package volume into the U.S. increase since May 2, 2025, and what measures does CBP have in place to ensure these packages are compliant with the new rules blocking *de minimis* treatment for goods of Chinese origin?

Answer: CBP tracked notable increases in the average daily volume of *de minimis* shipments since May 2, 2025 from multiple countries including South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam,

⁸ <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-19/chapter-I/part-145/subpart-B/section-145.12>

Cambodia, and the United Arab Emirates. CBP's enforcement efforts prioritize the targeting of high-risk shipments. CBP officers are actively reviewing and inspecting targeted shipments and taking enforcement actions as appropriate.

Question 8g: Has CBP caught any fraudulent activity related to the end of *de minimis* treatment for goods from China since May 2, 2025? If so, how many instances, and what penalties or other remedies have been employed?

Answer: Since May 2, 2025, CBP executed approximately 1,050 enforcement actions on violative shipments that would have previously qualified for the *de minimis* exemption. These actions have included denying entry, seizing, and/or destroying cargo, and the issuance of more than 100 monetary penalties.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026

TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2025.

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

WITNESS

HA NGUYEN MCNEILL, ACTING ADMINISTRATOR, THE TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Mr. AMODEI. The Subcommittee on Homeland Security will come to order. I am pleased to be joined by the subcommittee's distinguished ranking member, the gentlelady from Illinois, Ms. Underwood.

Welcome Acting Administrator McNeill. I sincerely thank you for being here, even though you have been here longer than me.

I am going to skip all that.

I will now turn to my colleague, Ms. Underwood, for her opening remarks.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. McNeill, welcome to our subcommittee, and congratulations on your appointment. It was good to meet with you last week.

As we all know, TSA has no freedom to fail. Whether it is at the train station or at the airport, our transportation security officers must get it right, screening well over 2 million people per day, 24/7, 365 days a year.

This is a high-stakes, high-pressure job where transportation security officers, or TSOs, welcome travelers from all walks of life, while screening millions of passengers and bags each day.

TSOs need less stress at work, not more, so that they can focus on keeping our skies secure.

But under this administration, DHS has abandoned its collective bargaining agreement with nearly 50,000 TSOs, including about 2,500 in Illinois.

Stripping away those protections makes it harder for officers to do their jobs effectively.

This decision was made with no data on savings or benefits to show the taxpayer, other than vague comments from DHS about how the union representatives for TSOs will have to go back to work.

The truth is, there is significant uncertainty about whether the traveling public will benefit from this action in a meaningful way. So far, the best that TSA can do is show us \$35,000 in savings.

Beginning in 2024, and prior to the cancellation of collective bargaining, TSA had reduced attrition rates by nearly half, and in an agency that has historically struggled with staffing, actions like

this only threaten morale and make it harder for TSOs to stay focused on their core mission.

That kind of consistency in the workforce is what helps to improve TSA's ability to find contraband and keep dangerous people off planes.

Deputy Administrator McNeill, while I understand that this action was taken before your most recent tenure, this subcommittee needs a more substantive justification than TSA has provided so far.

As far as today's hearing is concerned, we are here to get more information on the skinny budget which proposes a cut of \$247 million, or about 3 percent, of TSA's overall budget.

Last week, Secretary Noem said in her hearing that these cuts were meant to demonstrate reduced TSA screening presence for activities such as exit lane monitoring.

However, just a couple months ago, the Trump administration agreed to an anomaly in the full-year funding bill, to increase TSA funding by \$450 million provided by Congress.

And while we have no insight into the reasoning behind these cuts when the only justification provided in the skinny budget is angry rhetoric about the prior administration, I am also concerned that this budget fails to meet TSA's security needs.

For example, we know that TSA's screening equipment requires upgrades, but it appears that funding is being deprioritized in this administration, to fund political priorities.

If screening operations are underresourced, it puts our ability to detect dangerous weapons, drugs, and trafficking activity at serious risk. And the consequences could be catastrophic.

Ms. McNeill, while I understand this proposal was written by your predecessors, you are TSA's leader, and during today's hearing, we are looking for more accurate and relevant information than we have seen thus far from the Department under this administration, so that we can do the incredibly important work of resourcing TSA to keep Americans safe.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Madam Acting Administrator, without objection, your full written testimony will be entered into the record, and with that in mind, we would ask you to summarize, to the extent possible, your opening statement. The floor is yours for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF HA NGUYEN MCNEILL

Ms. MCNEILL. Good afternoon, Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Underwood, and distinguished members of this subcommittee. Thank you for the invitation to testify before you today on behalf of the Transportation Security Administration.

I am honored to be here and grateful for the long-standing and productive partnership TSA shares with this distinguished subcommittee.

I would like to start by thanking TSA's employees for their unrelenting efforts day in and day out to secure the Nation's transportation systems.

TSA is an agile security agency, embodied by a dedicated and professional workforce that works tirelessly to outmatch an increasingly sophisticated and dynamic threat.

Today TSA stands at an important strategic crossroads. The upcoming 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Summer Olympics present an enormous opportunity for the Nation to boldly transform and modernize travel.

The President, Secretary Noem, and this administration are committed to delivering a golden age of U.S. travel, one that Americans will be proud of and deserve.

The importance of a seamless and secure U.S. transportation system cannot be overstated economically, logistically, and strategically.

Yes, travel, is a \$2.9 trillion industry, employing more than 15 million workers nationwide. Metrics are expected to continue growing larger.

While the previous administration prioritized DEI in a collective bargaining agreement that undermined our vital mission, under Secretary Noem's leadership, we are recommitting TSA to its core mission—leaning into innovation, organizational accountability, and a renewed focus on security and the passenger experience.

TSA's fortified aviation security will be coupled with an improved, streamlined, and consistent experience at airports nationwide.

I also want to acknowledge our traveling families and the efforts currently under way at TSA to lighten the burden of air travel for them. In the near future, we will begin implementing plans to ease some of the stress families face moving in and out of airports.

As American families plan trips in the coming years, they can rest assured that at TSA, we will implement processes that put them first, strengthening and empowering family values through commercial aviation.

I am excited to share more about these initiatives with this subcommittee and the American people in the coming weeks.

With TSA screening over 3 million passengers on peak days, commercial aviation remains a top target for nefarious actors. The future of aviation security will be a balance of human talent and leveraging emerging technology.

With the continued support of Congress, TSA is deploying state-of-the-art screening technology to airports nationwide, equipping the screening workforce with the tools they need to combat evolving threats.

Two examples are Credential Authentication, or CAT, machines, and Computed Tomography, or CT, machines.

CAT is an aviation security game-changer, improving identity verification at checkpoints, verifying reservations, and performing realtime, secure flight checks to ensure passengers receive the appropriate level of screening.

CT is a state-of-the-art X-ray scanner, applying sophisticated algorithms for the detection of explosives and threat items by creating a 3D image, which can be viewed and rotated 360 degrees for a thorough analysis by a TSA officer.

Underpinning all of this is the necessity that all passengers seeking to board an airplane carry identification that meets critical security standards. These standards are in place to combat fraudulent IDs and prevent bad actors from inflicting harm on the American people.

Under the leadership of Secretary Noem, as of May 7th, TSA is fully enforcing REAL ID requirements at all airports without impeding the flow of passengers through the checkpoint.

We are happy to report that thus far 93 percent of IDs presented at TSA checkpoints were either REAL ID-compliant or another acceptable form of ID. This initial success is a testament of the hard work of the men and women serving at TSA.

In conclusion, the future of TSA will be marked by a laser focus on delivering for the American people. What that means is a fortification of travel security, a renewed commitment to the passenger experience, and serving as a responsible steward of the American tax dollar.

TSA looks forward to continuing to work with Congress, industry, and other stakeholders to strengthen transportation security and improve the passenger experience.

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Underwood, and members of the subcommittee, it is a privilege to testify before you today. I thank you for your support and look forward to your questions.

[The information follows:]



TESTIMONY OF

Ha McNeill
Acting Administrator
Transportation Security Administration

BEFORE

House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security

ON

Oversight Hearing:
The Transportation Security Administration

May 20, 2025
Washington, D.C.

Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Underwood, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the invitation to testify before you today on behalf of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). I am honored to be here and grateful for the longstanding and productive partnership TSA shares with this distinguished Subcommittee.

Today, TSA stands at an important strategic crossroads. The upcoming 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Summer Olympics present an enormous opportunity for the Nation to boldly transform and modernize its travel nodes and networks.

The importance of a seamless and secure U.S. transportation system cannot be overstated—economically, logistically, and strategically. This includes an \$11 trillion industry employing more than 15 million workers nationwide, a metric that is only expected to grow. The President, Secretary Noem, and this Administration are committed to delivering a Golden Age of U.S. Travel, one that Americans will be proud of and deserve. TSA constitutes an integral component of that vision. The President and the Secretary also recognize that customer service is central to TSA's mission. As arguably the most visible government agency to the America public, one potentially unpleasant interaction with an officer could forever tarnish a traveler's perception of the agency.

While the previous Administration prioritized DEI over many of our national security agencies vital missions, under Secretary Noem's leadership, we are recommitting TSA to its core mission—leaning into innovation, organizational accountability, and a renewed focus on passenger experience and security. On peak days, TSA screens over three million passengers, routinely engaging with more Americans and foreign visitors than any other DHS component. TSA is an agile security agency, embodied by a dedicated and professional workforce, that works tirelessly to outmatch an increasingly sophisticated and dynamic threat. TSA's greatest asset is its people, and I want to thank TSA's employees for their unrelenting efforts day in and day out to secure the Nation's transportation systems. From our Transportation Security Officers (TSOs), Canine Handlers, Federal Air Marshals (FAMs) and more, these men and women all embody the Agency's core values.

I would also like to thank TSA's tremendous partners ranging from interagency, state, local, international, and industry. These critical partnerships have enabled TSA to strengthen transportation security, gain operational efficiencies, and improve the passenger experience.

Through increased innovation and a renewed commitment to the American people, TSA's future will be defined by a traveler security experience that is less intrusive while maintaining the high standard of security Americans expect. Fortified aviation security will be coupled with an improved, streamlined, and consistent experience at airports nationwide. As American families plan trips in the coming years, they can rest assured that at TSA we will be dedicated to crafting policies and processes that put them first.

Overview of TSA

While we look to and prepare for the future, we must also never forget our past. The Nation will soon mark 25 years since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Through swift action by Congress in response to the 9/11 attacks, TSA was established in November 2001 by the *Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA)*. Since its inception, TSA has stayed true and steadfast in its commitment to the American people to provide the highest level of security across all modes of transportation, including aviation, air cargo, mass transit, passenger and freight rail, highway and motor carrier, maritime, and pipeline.

In the years since 9/11, the Nation's transportation networks have expanded, while transportation security threats have evolved and become more dynamic. Passenger volumes have reached record highs at the airports. Over the course of 2024, TSA screened 904 million passengers, 494 million checked bags, and 2.1 billion carry-on bags.

Management of this great responsibility is supported by critical pilot programs that Congress has afforded us to explore with industry and international partners to better improve the passenger experience. Domestically, the Reimbursable Screening Services Program (RSSP) allows industry to provide white-glove screening services outside an airport terminal, which is an innovative way to offset TSA costs. With our international partners, TSA is advancing our One Stop Security (OSS) pilot program which will significantly streamline screening for our inbound international visitors and Americans traveling abroad.

TSA Priorities

Technology

The transportation sector remains a top target for nefarious actors both here, at home, and abroad, in the physical and cyber realms. Greater access to technology enables TSA's screening workforce to assess potential threats quickly and efficiently while supporting a more seamless experience for the traveling public. With the continued support of Congress, TSA is deploying state-of-the-art screening technology to airports nationwide, equipping the screening workforce with the tools they need to combat evolving threats. To meet our goals of modernizing the travel experience, a commitment to continually embracing new and emerging technology is urgently needed. Given the pace of the evolving threat and bad actors looking to thwart our last line of defense, TSA needs to be able to leverage technological advances at the pace of innovation. Today, two existing technology programs help advance that goal - the Credential Authentication Technology and Computed Tomography.

Credential Authentication Technology (CAT)

As of April 2025, TSA has reached a cumulative deployment of over 2,136 CAT machines across 247 locations. CAT is an aviation security game changer, improving identity verification at checkpoints, ensuring ID authentication, enhancing fraudulent ID detection capabilities, reservation verification, and real-time Secure Flight checks. The CAT machines have been updated to enable the use of optional facial recognition technology to match credentials to the passenger, while safeguarding and protecting their privacy. CAT has also become the impetus for allowing the use of Mobile Driver's Licenses (mDLs) and Digital IDs (dID) at our

checkpoints. Currently, CAT machines accept mDLs and dIDs from 15 states, including many of those represented on this Subcommittee, including Nevada, Florida, Iowa, Mississippi, Texas, Arizona, Illinois, and Hawaii. CAT machines are deployed at 247 of the 432 commercial airports nationwide, which equates to an estimated 58% of Full Operational Capability (FOC). TSA's deployment of CATs to all airports nationwide is not expected to be completed until 2049.

Computed Tomography (CT)

As of April 2025, TSA has reached a cumulative deployment of 968 CT machines across 255 locations. CTs are state-of-the-art X-ray scanning equipment, applying sophisticated algorithms for the detection of explosives and other prohibited items by creating a 3D image which can be viewed and rotated 360 degrees for a thorough analysis. These capabilities eliminate the need for passengers to take electronics and travel-size liquids, aerosols, and gels out of carry-on bags, both improving the passenger experience and the security of the traveling public. CT machines are deployed at 255 of the 432 commercial airports nationwide, with an estimated 43% of FOC. TSA's deployment of CTs to all airports nationwide is not expected to be completed until 2043.

These bold investments in technology will pay multiple dividends in the out years as we work to reposition the Nation as the number one global travel destination.

REAL ID

Under the leadership of Secretary Noem, TSA is meeting its statutory requirement and fully enforcing REAL ID requirements. The *REAL ID Act of 2005* enacted the 9/11 Commission Report recommendation aimed at combatting fraudulent IDs and ensuring passengers are who they say they are, preventing bad actors from getting on commercial airplanes. As the 9/11 Commission Report stated, "For terrorists, travel documents are as important as weapons." This Administration will no longer delay the decades long deferment of these requirements.

As of May 7, 2025, TSA is enforcing REAL ID compliance at airports across the country. Over 93 percent of IDs presented at the TSA checkpoint are either REAL ID compliant or another acceptable form of ID. We will continue working closely with all states to ensure widespread adoption of REAL IDs. Additionally, managing passenger volume and screening checkpoint flow will require close coordination between TSA, airlines, and airport operators at the local level. Maintaining effective communication with stakeholders and providing operational flexibility to local TSA personnel will ensure TSA maintains the highest standards for aviation security, without impeding the flow of passengers through the screening checkpoint.

Conclusion

Continued congressional engagement and support is critical to ensuring TSA can continue to fulfill its national security mission. To achieve our priorities, TSA will continue to work collaboratively with Congress, industry, and other stakeholders to strengthen aviation security and improve the passenger experience.

With continued support from Congress and this Committee, a screening process that is efficient, technologically integrated, secure, and more affordable to the American taxpayer is within our grasp.

Chairman Amodei, Acting Ranking Member Underwood, and members of the Subcommittee, it is a privilege to testify before you today. I thank you for your support and look forward to this discussion and your questions.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you, ma'am.

Ms. Underwood, the floor is yours for 5 minutes for questions.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Ms. McNeill, thanks for being here today. TSA plays a vital role in safeguarding our Nation's transportation systems while ensuring the free movement of people and commerce.

However, this administration's fiscal year 2026 budget proposes large cuts to TSA's workforce and operations, particularly affecting small commercial and general aviation airports, including those serving rural and suburban communities like mine in Illinois's 14th District.

General aviation airports, often with limited or no onsite security, remain vulnerable entry points in our transportation system.

As security at commercial airports has strengthened, these gaps continue to pose real risks to communities like mine.

With these cuts in fiscal year 2026, how will you ensure continued compliance with TSA's national security mandates at airports that cannot afford to subsidize Federal security operations on their own?

Ms. MCNEILL. Thank you, Ranking Member, for that question. With regard to smaller airports and general aviation airports, we are working closely with stakeholders and have recently issued a set of security guidelines for them to meet in the July timeframe.

We have been in constant communication with them over the weeks and months leading into this deadline and working closely to make sure that they institute the security standards to combat the evolving threat.

You know, as it pertains to our staffing model, the reduction in the TSO workforce in the skinny budget represents between 3 and 4 percent of the workforce. Half of that is designated for exit lanes.

We have always been of the opinion that having a highly trained TSO man an exit lane, sit at an exit lane, is not the best use of their skills. They would be better to be redeployed to the security checkpoint, and as such, we would look to working with this committee to find alternative ways of addressing the requirements of exit lanes.

The remainder of the cut represents about 2 percent of the TSO workforce, spread across 435 airports. That is a number that we feel we can manage, and we are very well prepared for the upcoming summer travel season.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you.

Airport security is only as good as your weakest link. As we all know too well from 9/11, bad actors do not have to get through screening at JFK or O'Hare to attack New York or Chicago. They can enter through a poorly secured airport in a rural area or U.S. Territory and then fly to a major population center with little to no additional screening.

Your testimony notes that you do not plan to deploy baggage screening CT machines at all commercial airports until 2043.

What actions is TSA currently taking, with fiscal year 2025 funding and in the 2026 budget request, to ensure airports in these regions are not left exposed to ongoing national security vulnerabilities?

Ms. MCNEILL. So for the 2025 reconciliation, that is with Congress right now. I am not aware of—

Ms. UNDERWOOD. No, no, no, 2025 funding, we did a CR, so you all have 2025 funding.

Ms. MCNEILL. Yes. So we are deploying what was funded in the 2025 budget. For 2026, I look forward to the President's full budget coming out, and we can work with this committee to ensure and see how we can accelerate the deployment of CT technology.

As you note, the current forecast is full operating capability by 2043. Again, we would love to work with this committee to see if we can shift that to the left.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Thank you.

Now turning to the workforce itself, TSA's frontline workforce, transportation security officers, are still excluded from the full rights and protections afforded under Title 5 of the U.S. Code.

And yet the President's recent executive order on labor management relations conveniently excludes TSA's workforce while protecting other Federal unions that endorsed his candidacy.

Can you explain to the subcommittee why this administration believes that TSOs should be excluded from basic Federal labor protections while other politically aligned unions are not?

Ms. MCNEILL. The TSO—the Collective Bargaining Agreement, or CBA, for the TSO falls outside of the scope of Title 5, as you noted.

You know, what the rescission of the CBA did was really return our focus to the mission of the agency, which is aviation security, return the man hours of over 200 TSOs to delivering security for the traveling public, and it also has allowed the frontline management more flexibility to ensure that they are delivering security for the American people.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Okay. Thank you.

As I said in my opening, TSA's press release announcing this decision provided no details, and TSA has only said that time is needed to figure out if this was a good idea, and that TSA is exploring what datasets are available that may help inform this issue.

These should have been clearly defined well ahead of making such a big decision.

The safety of the American people demands that our transportation security infrastructure, including our workforce, be robust, resilient, and uniform across all facilities large and small.

I appreciate you coming to testify today, but the fact remains that we need more information and consistent, detailed communication with you and your team to write a bill that meets the growing needs of your agency. I look forward to working with you to do so, and I yield back.

Thank you.

Mr. AMODEI. Mr. Newhouse, the floor is yours.

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Acting Administrator, for being here with us today. Excuse me.

Looking at the recently released skinny budget, if I could get you to comment a little bit on that, it reduces the transportation security officer levels consistent with the President's goal to reduce wasteful government spending and abuse of government programs.

So I don't want to put you in a position of contradicting the entire budget. However, could you elaborate on how reducing the budget line for screening officers aligns with the traveler security

experience that is less intrusive, while at the same time maintaining the high standard of security at American—that Americans expect?

Ms. MCNEILL. Certainly. So thank you for that question, Congressman. I look forward to discussing the details of the President's budget when the details of the—the full budget is released, but my understanding is that it is striking a balance between a labor workforce and investment in technology which will yield a more seamless passenger experience once the balance is struck.

We need to, you know, continually evolve to meet the emerging threats to aviation and transportation security, and that is not something that is going to be solved by labor alone and human talent alone. It is going to be the right combination of talent and technology.

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Good. Fair enough.

So, Mr. Chairman, I have been waiting for the opportunity to bring this next thing up. My district is home to the Department of Energy's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, and where you probably know this already, researchers pioneered the use of the millimeter wave technology for passenger screening, thus creating what we like to refer to as the PNNL salute, which everybody knows—it is this. We are all familiar with that, that we use at screening checkpoints around the country.

In your testimony, Madam Acting Administrator, you note that the investments in technology will pay multiple dividends in the out years as TSA works to reposition the Nation as the number 1 global travel destination. And I agree with that. So two questions about that.

Does TSA have sufficient resources and authorities needed to develop or collaborate on the development of technologies so that TSA can leverage technological advances at the pace of innovation?

And if not, could you elaborate on the resources and/or the authorities that may be needed for TSA to fulfill its mission now and in the future?

Ms. MCNEILL. Thank you. This is an area where we would look forward to working with this committee to see what can be done in terms of capital investment for technology, to ensure that TSA has the tools and the frontline workforce has the tools that they need to enhance transportation security.

I mentioned the CAT and the CT programs earlier. In addition to that, we would look to develop an IT infrastructure that connects the equipment at our airports to really yield efficiencies and heighten security and allow us to do things like field kind of cutting-edge innovations around algorithms and threat detection, as well as remote screening whereby we can connect all the equipment and really make the best use of our TSO workforce.

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Okay. Thank you very much again for being here with us, and, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. The gentleman from Laredo, the floor is yours.

Mr. CUELLAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, and, Acting Administrator, thank you for what you do and what your men and women do. A couple questions.

In light of the pay adjustment that we did, how is that working with TSA in recruitment and retaining personnel to make sure that we ensure safety and security at our airports? Question number 1.

Question number 2, what is TSA doing to ensure that smaller airports, like my hometown of Laredo, Texas, are also being prioritized in the modernization and new technology?

Because, again, I get to talk to them every week, coming and going, and sometimes they feel that the smaller communities are left behind on that.

And then finally, the last question has to do with something that I brought up to you when we met, was, in the past, I have asked prior administrators, if you have any technology equipment you are not going to use, maybe use that surplus to small, rural, county jails, sheriffs that might use that technology.

And they did look at that, but the problem is those long-term contracts, that they said, we will take the technology, but we don't want to take this contract that is just—a small community couldn't handle.

So those three questions, and, again, thank you, and good seeing you again.

Ms. MCNEILL. Thank you, Congressman. So the first question about pay and retention, as compared to 2 years ago, we have seen significant improvements in the retention rate of our frontline workforce. And that is ascribed to the pay increase that you all were able to provide and that I know the TSOs are thankful for every day. We do hear such positive feedback, and so we thank you for that.

On small airports and technology, I think there is a few things that we are doing there. I mean, when we look at the deployment of CTs and CAT machines, for example, they are not all at, you know, our largest airports. We do try to take a look at the full landscape.

But some of the things that we are doing, working closely with our stakeholders, is to find creative ways where public-private partnerships can drive the quicker deployment of technology across our airport system.

And then thirdly on that, you know, we would look forward to working closely with you to see if we can reach full operating capability for those programs faster than, you know, in the next two decades, so.

And then lastly on surplus, I appreciate your question on that. Obviously, we do have technology that, you know, is getting replaced, and in conversations with State and localities that might need it, what we have been doing is trying to assess what the full scope of responsibility is for taking over such equipment, what the maintenance and support might look like, and really provide them as much information as possible so that they can plan it into their budget cycles.

But, again, I think it is something that we are refreshing all the time, looking at the list of potential surplus, and happy to continue to work with the communities on that.

Mr. CUELLAR. Yeah, if you can work on that, because, again, that surplus equipment is good, but it is that maintenance contract that just gets it out of hand.

But I know that, you know, my friend, Tony Gonzales, over there, west Texas sheriffs, south Texas sheriffs, El Paso, and other areas, they could use some of that equipment.

But it is that long-term maintenance that just puts it out of hand, so if you can come up with a solution, that would be good. With that, I say thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. AMODEI. Mrs. Hinson, the floor is yours.

Mrs. HINSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to Acting Administrator McNeill for coming before our committee today. I am excited about the new golden age of U.S. travel that we are experiencing, especially as someone who flies literally every week, like everybody up here on the dais, so.

Under the Biden administration and Secretary Mayorkas, though, we did see the Federal Air Marshals whose mission is to be up there in the skies, pulled from many of those flights and then pulled to process paperwork at the Southern Border.

I think it was a reckless decision. It got rid of a critical layer of aviation security, but it also left American travelers more vulnerable at heightened times.

So can you speak to how the Trump administration is reversing course on those policies and how vital the Federal Air Marshal Service is to preventing those threats and keeping our skies secure?

Ms. MCNEILL. Thank you. So the Federal Air Marshals are a critical enforcement—law enforcement component of TSA. They keep our skies safe every day through their critical mission flights and also their surface operations.

This is going to be even more and more important as we embark on big undertakings like welcoming the world in for the World Cup in 2026 and the Olympics in 2028.

It is one team, one fight. So we do collaborate very closely with our law enforcement partners across the Department of Homeland Security, and ensure that we are there to surge if, you know, if needed.

But at this moment in time, you know, that is not a need that we have seen. We stand ready and without kind of, you know, impacting our ability to conduct our aviation security mission.

Mrs. HINSON. Yeah. Well, I am certainly glad to see them returned to the mission they are supposed to be doing.

I also want to discuss how your agency's skinny budget request notes its intention to reduce the total number of TSA officers in line with the President's directive to cut wasteful government spending.

Following up on my colleague's question, are there some specific technologies that in particular, once this is in motion and once those technologies—they could be deployed to help make a better customer experience?

Ms. MCNEILL. So the Computed Tomography and CAT machines are kind of the baseline technology that really will enable us to deploy more innovative ways of driving efficiencies.

So for example, the Credential Authentication Technology and identity verification technology at the checkpoint, and if you combine that, for example, with e-gates, which is something that our

stakeholders have expressed a lot of interest in working together on, then that might help alleviate some of the TSO head count at the checkpoint and drive efficiencies that way.

With the Computed Tomography machine, you could envision a day where we are driving algorithms that help with threat detection more effectively, more accurately, and where the TSOs are looking at images that alarm only, and not, you know, need to look at every image that comes through.

That would significantly help with through-put and capacity at the checkpoints.

Mrs. HINSON. Awesome. Well, again, thank you to your amazing team at the airport where I fly out of every week, and I appreciate all the work you are doing. Thanks for coming before the committee.

Ms. MCNEILL. Thank you.

Mrs. HINSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. AMODEI. They have called votes on the floor. I am going to call on Ms. Escobar for her questions, and then if the two Republican members want to stay to ask questions, then I will remain to preside over it until then.

If you don't, then we will submit your questions as written ones, but—and by the way, I don't plan to come back. I plan to adjourn the hearing when I leave.

So the floor is yours, Ms. Escobar.

Ms. ESCOBAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Madam Ranking Member.

Acting Administrator McNeill, thank you for being here, and thank you for your service to our Nation.

I think I am not overstating the concern that millions of Americans are really frightened of flying right now with all of the news and with some of the recent events.

And I understand where they are coming from, and I will tell you the deep cuts in the skinny budget and the impact that DOGE has made on our Federal agencies and Federal workforce, certainly none of that helps.

And so I am hoping that you will help us understand a little bit more about some of these decisions.

One of the things that constituents of mine and TSA employees have mentioned is the concern about the potential privatization of TSA.

It was mentioned in Project 2025. We have seen this administration essentially use Project 2025 as a roadmap for many of the their decisions.

And the TSA workforce is really important to our safety and security, and the idea that they could be privatized, obviously, is an area of concern for them.

Do you believe that TSA should be privatized?

Ms. MCNEILL. So privatization has always been a part of the TSA construct since its inception under the Screening Partnership Program.

As a regulator, though, TSA is responsible for ensuring the highest level of delivery at our transportation checkpoints, whether that screening is being performed by Federal employees or by a

privatized screening workforce. So that is part of our remit and our responsibility that we carry out day in and day out.

As we look to modernize TSA, I would say, you know, the stakeholders have a word in this—this committee and this Congress—and we look forward to working with them. Nothing is off the table.

I think, again, the north star for us at TSA is making sure that we are driving the highest level of security, the best passenger experience in the most efficient way possible, and so if new privatization schemes make sense, then we are happy to have that discussion, to see, you know, what we can come up with.

It is not an all-or-nothing game. There could be airports that choose to privatize and others that do not. I think that airport choice is really important as part of this as well.

Ms. ESCOBAR. I definitely would call it a scheme as well. I hope that privatization is not a part of the administration's efforts. Our very loyal, hardworking TSA agents are really—or officers, rather, are really concerned about this. I hear about it all the time.

The other thing that I hear about from them is the illegal ending of their collective bargaining agreement and the Ranking Member asked you a question. You didn't really quite answer it—but I want to follow up on this issue of the termination of the labor protections that they negotiated.

In TSA's press release—and the ranking member mentioned this in her opening—TSA's press release announced this decision and provided no details.

TSA has only said that time is needed to figure out if this was a good idea and that TSA is exploring what datasets are available that may help inform this issue.

These should have been clearly defined well ahead of making such a big decision.

So can you tell us now, what are the specific metrics that TSA used in making this decision?

Ms. MCNEILL. So the rescission of the CBA was made with security in mind in terms of returning hours to the security checkpoint and not union work. So that was over 200 FTE hours returned to the security checkpoint.

It allows for flexibility in management to ensure that the workforce is delivering the highest level of security to the American traveling public.

We have seen an improvement in call-out numbers, so that means that our, you know, employees are there carrying out their mission day in and day out. Yeah.

Ms. ESCOBAR. I have heard from TSOs that they consider the rescinding of the agreement to be a real betrayal, and so I am very concerned about what is ahead for them, but with that, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEL. Mr. Gonzales?

Mr. GONZALES. Thank you, Chairman. I am going to submit my questions for the record, but I want to note something.

You know, under the last administration, it was pure madness. If you were a U.S. citizen, you would have to go through the line. You would have to show your ID to get on a commercial plane.

But if you were an illegal alien and you were using the CBP One app, you could just board on a plane no problem.

Now, I am grateful that Secretary Noem has rescinded that policy. One of the questions I have, and then I will yield back, is, has TSA conducted a formal review of how many individuals, who boarded domestic flights under the CBP One process, were later flagged as potential national security threats?

Once again, I look forward to working with you. I think there is a lot of topics at hand, but one of those is the amount of legal travel that is occurring and not having that separated from those that are flying illegally.

With that, Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Thank you.

Mr. Guest

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Administrator McNeill. Thank you for coming by the office last week. I enjoyed getting the chance to visit with you, and so I will make my questions brief.

We are aware that the budget request for fiscal year 2026 is a reduction from fiscal year 2025. You and I had conversations about the way in which the agency could better utilize manpower.

One of the things that you and I talked about was the elimination of exit lane staffing, that currently that is a requirement that falls under TSA, and it is estimated that as upwards of \$100 million could potentially be saved if we could either automate that or if we could turn that responsibility over to other agencies, airport police, things of that nature.

So I want to thank you for looking at ways in which you can make the current manpower, make them more efficient, and to carry out their core mission, which is to protect the safety of the traveling public.

I also know that many years ago, Congress decided that we were going to take a portion of the aviation passenger security fee that is collected by TSA, that Congress originally intended to help stand up TSA, to help fund your agency, to help purchase the technology that you need.

We know that there is a minimal amount that is attached to each trip. I think it is \$5.60 per passenger, per trip, and that money was originally designed to go back into TSA's budget.

I also know that there has been some delays, if you will, in rolling out some of the checkpoint screening technology, and many of those delays have been attributed to funding, that TSA has asked for funding for that technology and that that funding has either been denied or that funding has then been used in other areas.

And so my question briefly is, if we were to give TSA the entirety of that security fee, which I believe, if I am not mistaken, was \$4.5 billion last year. It says here that in fiscal year 2026, we expected diversion to be roughly 1.6.

With that additional \$1.6 billion, if it was not diverted into the Federal Treasury, could that money be used for security screening, could it be used for additional personnel, pay raise, things of that nature, which would then lessen the burden on what you have to ask from Congress every year?

Ms. MCNEILL. Certainly. So, you know, I think if we had the appropriate resources, we could field some of the technology programs that we are currently fielding at a much quicker pace, and probably

with them, have full operating capability within this administration.

And then beyond that, there are other technological improvements that we would be looking to make to really enhance efficiencies.

And then obviously, you know, combining that with the workforce is what I think really provides the golden age of travel for the American public.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, and thank you for your service, and with that, I yield back.

Mr. AMODEI. Madam Acting Administrator, thank you for your testimony and your appearance today.

The subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:40 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD
SUBCOMMITTEE HOMELAND SECURITY
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Oversight Hearing – Transportation Security Administration
Tuesday, May 20

Representative Rutherford

1. eGates

To: Acting Administrator Ha Nguyen McNeill

This Administration has embraced public-private partnerships and government efficiencies. Modernization, automation, and cutting-edge technology are areas that should see momentum under this Administration. I know TSA is working with outside stakeholders to pilot new screening technologies—similar to what’s in use in airports like London and Dubai.

The US is hosting multiple global events in the future, such as the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Summer Olympics, so we cannot afford to wait for the introduction of new technologies that make travel safer and more efficient. Innovations, such as automated eGates, are available and are already being piloted in airports here in the US.

Question:

1. How do you envision TSA’s role in advancing airport innovation in ways that improve both security and efficiency?

TSA RESPONSE:

The 2026 FIFA World Cup and 2028 Summer Olympics present an enormous opportunity for the Nation to boldly transform the U.S. transportation system. The Transportation Security Administration is laser-focused on delivering for the American people, fortifying travel security, renewing its commitment to the traveler experience, and serving as a responsible steward of tax dollars.

The Transportation Security Administration is committed to helping facilitate the Golden Age of Travel, one that Americans will be proud of and deserve. The importance of a seamless and secure transportation system cannot be overstated—economically, logistically, and strategically. In the United States alone, transportation is a \$3 trillion industry employing more than 15 million people.

To achieve this goal, Transportation Security Administration is embarking on an ambitious transformational journey to modernize operations, enhance security, and

improve customer experience through 1) innovative public-private partnerships, 2) leveraging cutting edge technologies, and 3) infrastructure upgrades. The Transportation Security Administration has identified specific initiatives designed to achieve these goals ranging from touchless identity verification, automated wait-times, remote screening, and real-time checkpoint connectivity to artificial intelligence-powered screening algorithms. These initiatives represent the future of aviation security – creating a seamless, efficient experience for travelers while maintaining the highest security standards.

Two existing technology programs form the baseline upon which to modernize the security checkpoint – the Credential Authentication Technology program and the computed tomography scanner.

The Credential Authentication Technology program is an aviation security game changer, improving identity verification at checkpoints, verifying reservations, and performing real-time Secure Flight checks to ensure passengers receive the appropriate level of screening.

Additional capabilities have recently been added, including confirmation that a presented driver's license is REAL ID compliant, and the ability to accept and authenticate a digital ID such as a mobile driver's license. The digital ID capability offers passengers a touchless/contactless customer experience at the Travel Document Checker. The Credential Authentication Technology program continues to deploy units with these additional capabilities to smaller airports.

Computed tomography technology, with its ability to review images in 3D, allows for the detection of smaller threats with greater precision. With the inclusion of advanced algorithms, computed tomography technologies hold the promise of screening carry-on property while reducing the need for unpacking. Remote screening of computed tomography images at a centralized offsite location will provide the ability to improve the passenger experience and increase throughput. The Transportation Security Administration can realize savings by adding networking capabilities across airport hubs and spokes, enabling more efficient allocation of labor.

While Transportation Security Administration will maximize internal resources and its existing authorities, Congressional support is key to executing this transformation on behalf of the American people.

2. Ahead of these major events, how can the agency do a better job of leveraging private sector innovation in order to make this modernization a reality?

TSA RESPONSE:

The Transportation Security Administration employs a number of approaches to leveraging private sector innovation for the modernization of airport security.

First, through maintaining collaborative partnerships with technology companies, the Transportation Security Administration gains awareness of existing technological options

as well as the latest innovations available. Second, the Transportation Security Administration continues to use innovation test beds, such as those in Las Vegas and Atlanta, to allow technology providers to pilot new solutions in real-world airport settings. This hands-on approach helps identify effective technologies that can be scaled for broader implementation.

There are other potential venues that the Transportation Security Administration can leverage to access private sector resources and innovations, but they also require support from Congress.

1. Currently, industry/security partners wanting to donate transportation security equipment to the Transportation Security Administration must purchase it themselves and cannot provide the Transportation Security Administration with a monetary donation to support activities such as testing, maintenance, and procurement. Given the Transportation Security Administration's market buying power, if industry monetary donations are allowed, then the Transportation Security Administration could procure these services and equipment at a lower cost than what industry might pay.
2. The Reimbursable Screening Services Program enables the Transportation Security Administration to work with stakeholder program participants to provide screening services to passengers in a location separate from the checkpoint – for example, at VIP terminals and off-airport locations like cruise terminals. If the Reimbursable Screening Services Program authority expires on September 30, 2025, as currently scheduled, all eight existing Reimbursable Screening Services Program pilot locations must end. Permanently authorizing the program would provide certainty and increase industry interest and participation. The Reimbursable Screening Services Program embodies the importance of public private partnerships to explore innovative screening models, including for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and 2028 Olympics.

Representative Ciscomani

2. CAP Program

To: Acting Administrator Ha Nguyen McNeill

The Transportation Security Administration developed the Capability Acceptance Process to facilitate receiving security equipment and related services from industry stakeholders and security partners such as airports and airlines. The Capability Acceptance Process represents a way for the private sector to help supplement Transportation Security Administration's capabilities and enhance the security and passenger experience through the donation of approved transportation security equipment.

It's my understanding however, that even with this process in place, and the already approved list of acceptable donations, the timeline for deployment of these capabilities can take years. We cannot afford to wait years for equipment that has already been approved and donated to sit idle

while we continue to see an increase in travel here in the United States. With major global events such as the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Summer Olympics on the horizon, this program seems like a commonsense way to leverage the private sector in order to help the agency upgrade their capabilities.

Question: What steps are you taking to ensure that programs such as these will move in a timelier manner under your leadership? Is there anything further we in Congress can do to help get these capabilities into the field more quickly, or spur more private sector involvement?

TSA Response:

The Capability Acceptance Program was implemented in 2019 under 49 U.S. Code §§ 106(m) and 114(m). Since that time, 611 items of transportation security equipment have been donated by private sector/local airport authority partners and are in use today, including: 109 Checkpoint computed tomography scanners, 10 computed tomography viewing stations, 75 Advanced Imaging Technology, 52 Credential Authentication Technologies, 27 Walk Through Metal Detectors, 31 Explosives Trace Detectors, 14 Bottled Liquid Scanners, 45 Boarding Pass Scanners, 178 Automated Screening Lanes, 16 Advanced Technology X-rays, and 54 Remote/Cross Lane Screening Devices. The Transportation Security Administration is currently processing 17 active donation projects with 479 pieces of transportation security equipment valued at \$198 million, including: 112 Checkpoint Computed Tomography Scanners, 52 Advanced Imaging Technology, 124 Credential Authentication Technologies, 40 Walk Through Metal Detectors, 64 Explosives Trace Detectors, 24 Bottled Liquid Scanners, 62 Boarding Pass Scanners, and 1 Explosives Detection System. These technologies will be deployed between June 2025 and December 2026, subject to completion of airport funded construction projects and facilities upgrades.

In Fiscal Year 2026 there are approximately 10 potential projects for which the Transportation Security Administration is awaiting formal offers. Noting such, I am committed to ensuring such donated equipment reaches the field as quickly as possible by removing unnecessary red tape and reengineering our intake processes.

Also, amending sections 106/114 of title 49, U.S. Code to authorize the Transportation Security Administration to accept monetary donations from industry partners would be another way to foster public/private partnership. Currently, industry/security partners wanting to donate transportation security equipment to the Transportation Security Administration must purchase it themselves and cannot provide the Transportation Security Administration with a monetary donation. Given the Transportation Security Administration's market buying power, if industry monetary donations are allowed, the Transportation Security Administration would be able to procure services and equipment at a lower cost than what industry might pay. Authorizing legislation would be required to give cash.

The Transportation Security Administration's public/private partnership could be further strengthened by the permanent authorization (or extension) of the Reimbursable

Screening Services Program Pilot authority beyond the eight pilot sites authorized by section 225 of the Fiscal Year 2019 Consolidated Appropriations Act (as amended), which expires at the end of this fiscal year. Reimbursable Screening Services Program enables the Transportation Security Administration to work with stakeholder program participants to provide screening services to passengers in a location separate from the checkpoint – for example at VIP terminals and off-airport locations like cruise terminals. If the Reimbursable Screening Services Program authority is allowed to expire on September 30, 2025, all eight existing Reimbursable Screening Services Program pilot locations must end. Permanently authorizing the program would provide certainty and increase industry interest and participation. Reimbursable Screening Services Program embodies the importance of public private partnerships to explore innovative screening models, including for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and 2028 Olympics.

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