

# INTERDICTING ILLICIT DRUG TRAFFICKING: A VIEW FROM THE FRONT LINES

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## HEARING

BEFORE THE

### COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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FEBRUARY 26, 2025

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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## **INTERDICTING ILLICIT DRUG TRAFFICKING: A VIEW FROM THE FRONT LINES**

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**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2025**

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:09 a.m., in room SR-253, Russell Office Building, Hon. Ted Cruz, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Cruz [presiding] Fischer, Blackburn, Budd, Moreno, Sullivan, Sheehy, Cantwell, Klobuchar, Markey, Baldwin, Kim, and Luján.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TED CRUZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM TEXAS**

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning. The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation will come to order.

Today we are here to talk about stopping deadly drugs from crossing our maritime borders. But you cannot stop illegal drugs from crossing a border if you do not believe in having them.

The Biden administration and former DHS Secretary Mayorkas deliberately ignored the painful connection between their open border policies and the devastation wrought by illegally trafficked drugs on families and communities in our country.

Trying to have a country without borders led to an influx of illegal aliens, drug smuggling, sex trafficking, and, tragically, far too many American lives lost.

That dereliction of basic sovereignty left the Coast Guard in an impossible position. The Coast Guard has admitted it missed opportunities to intercept drugs because it was overwhelmed chasing and catching illegal immigrants.

Despite the Biden administration's lack of interest in border security, Republicans were able to make some progress. In the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 I secured funding for a blimp-based radar system at South Padre Island to combat drug runners, poachers, and human traffickers. Today, it is still protecting south Texas.

Similarly, my provision requiring data sharing between CBP and the Coast Guard is streamlining interdiction in the southern maritime border, halting illegal incursions into the United States.

In contrast to Democrat ambivalence about the border crisis, President Trump and congressional Republicans are making real gains in border security through the Coast Guard.

In the last month the Coast Guard interdicted an historic amount of illegal drugs. Just last week it offloaded 37,000 pounds of seized cocaine worth \$279 million. That is going to make a real difference in keeping communities safe from criminals and addiction.

But protecting Americans from deadly illicit narcotics extends beyond our borders. We also need to reverse the Biden administration's dangerous policies in the Middle East where maritime drug running bankrolls Iran's malign activities.

Coast Guard cutters recently caught advanced weapons originating in Iran and bound for the Houthis in Yemen, as well as hundreds of kilograms of methamphetamines, heroin, and other illegal drugs from dhows in the Arabian Sea.

The Coast Guard and other Federal agencies have been catching and releasing Iranian drug runners, meaning there was no consequence beyond losing cargo for financing terrorism.

Let me be clear. Catch and release is a disgrace and an insult to those who have lost their lives to Iranian terrorism.

That is why I have included language in the Coast Guard Reauthorization Act of 2025 to empower the Coast Guard and the Navy to respond forcefully to dhows running drugs and weapons when they have helped finance Iranian terror.

Under President Trump's leadership we need to pass the Coast Guard Reauthorization Act and end the catch and release approach to Middle East drug enforcement.

That legislation, which has broad bipartisan and bicameral support, would also close a loophole in the ability to prosecute cartels for drug smuggling on remotely operated drone ships like the one in the hearing room today.

We also need to enact the Pay Our Coast Guard Act, which I will reintroduce this week along with Senator Cantwell, Sullivan, Baldwin, Wicker, and Blunt Rochester, to ensure that the Coast Guard is no longer the only armed service that goes unpaid during a government shutdown.

As I have said before, the Coast Guard deserves to be paid without question and without delay.

Finally, today we will hear powerful testimony from the unthinkable damage caused by illicit drugs like fentanyl to American families.

Texan Jena Ehlinger will testify about the effects this crisis had on her own family. I am grateful she is here today as she works to turn tragedy into progress, and I look forward to hearing from Ms. Ehlinger and the rest of our witnesses about what law enforcement needs to protect our communities.

Another American lost to fentanyl is one too many. I know that Ranking Member Cantwell agrees with me on this point and that is why we are working together on legislation to stop illicit fentanyl smuggling in the United States.

I am grateful for a partnership in this endeavor and now turn to her for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARIA CANTWELL,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM WASHINGTON**

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for having this very important hearing on fentanyl and what our committee and committee jurisdiction can do to stop the scourge of fentanyl.

I very much appreciate the witnesses being here: police chief of Spokane, Chief Hall, and Ms. Ehlinger. So sorry for your loss of your son Jake. You are such a brave advocate and thank you.

There are many brave advocates, like Laura Lynch who talks in Seattle about the loss of her daughter Brillion, and you are making a difference so thank you for being here today.

And I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, as we fight this scourge and work within our committee jurisdiction. Of the 10 states with the highest number of drug-related overdoses they all host major intermodal hubs. That is to say, states like mine, Washington, and yours, Texas, are clear nexuses to transportation networks.

I think we are going to hear from Chief Hall about how those networks allow for the distribution of fentanyl once they are across the border.

And overdose deaths continue to rise in most western states, up 14 percent in Washington just last year. The supply chain is clear. The Chinese triad sells precursor chemicals to Mexican drug cartels, hidden on ships and in air cargos, and cartels make fentanyl and smuggle it through the United States.

They hide fentanyl in personal vehicles, commercial trucks, busses, trains, planes, and even on unmanned aerial vehicles. So this is a danger to our national security and our transportation security. It is very highly toxic.

So it is, Mr. Chairman, the jurisdiction of our committee to have oversight over transportation security. Last year, I fought for more nonintrusive inspection technologies at U.S. Customs and Border—CBP—who I know we will hear from as well about how a 370—it now has 370 large nonintrusive inspection systems and more than 4,000 small systems across various ports of entry.

I have seen firsthand how this helps us detect better the next generation of technology, vapor technology, could be developed by our Pacific Northwest Lab and the University of Washington to increase even the speed and accuracy of this analysis.

Our national labs' Vapor ID accurately detects and identifies the vapors from illicit drugs and explosives in real time and in extremely small amounts. Rather than using surface swipes or the pulse of air for analysis the system sniffs the vapors, much the way a trained canine can detect explosives.

So our borders are not our only problem but this fentanyl detection at our borders is working. We need to do more.

Fentanyl smuggling happens every day within the borders of our country on our interstates, on our Amtrak, at our bus terminals, at our airports, and concealed U.S. mail and we must track the activities of these transportation networks.

Recent interdiction efforts in the state of Washington illustrates the importance of joint law enforcement efforts at our transportation hubs and networks.

Just last October we had the largest coordinated drug trafficking bust in Seattle—600 officers from 10 different states, local law enforcement agencies, and they disrupted a violent drug trafficking gang.

It resulted from a wiretap investigation of a shipment of fentanyl into the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. A year-long investigation was led by Homeland Security, the Seattle police, involving a U.S. attorney, FBI, DEA, ATF, CBP, Washington State Patrol, the King County Sheriff's Office, and Bellevue, Everett, Renton police departments and Yakima narcotics and gang task force members.

And in January 2023 law enforcement also conducted a bust at Sea-Tac discovering more than 400,000 fentanyl pills in a checked baggage of drug couriers. Traffickers were smuggling millions of pills into Puget Sound.

The Port of Seattle Police Department, working with DEA and canines, seized that fentanyl and the Phoenix Police Department then arrested the suspects in Arizona.

In 2024 the Burien Police Department, King County Sheriff's Office, and DEA seized more than 1 million fentanyl pills and meth and heroin, and traffickers transported hundreds of pounds of drugs in a semi truck on a regular trip from southern California into Washington.

So we must give law enforcement more tools—more tools to attack these transportation networks and stop the flow of these drugs into our states.

Chief Kevin Hall of the Spokane Police Department with us today has worked closely with Federal, state, and local law enforcement for more than 30 years. He will be speaking to this experience in eastern Washington and what he calls the super highways for fentanyl distribution.

As an enrolled member of the Colville tribe he also knows that tribal communities have been hard hit by fentanyl crisis because it is another place to hide these drugs and these rings, and that is why last year I introduced with Senators Baldwin, Luján, and Rosen the Stop Fentanyl Smuggling Act, largely supported by law enforcement, transportation, and forensic science groups including the National High-Intensity Drug Area.

And so witness Shannon Kelly is a director of the National High-Intensity Drug-Trafficking Area Program. She is also a member of the interdiction coordinator at the Office of the National Drug Control Policy.

So I look forward to asking her about this and the ways in which we can all work together to stop the flow of fentanyl, accelerate the development of next-generation nonintrusive inspection technology and build state and local forensic science capabilities.

So I hope that we all can work together collaboratively. I think it shows that we can disrupt this trafficking.

So I am very pleased to work with you, Mr. Chairman, on these issues and I appreciate your focus on the Coast Guard's critical role in this area.

I know that the Coast Guard has been working but we need to do more. I want to acknowledge that the crew of the Coast Guard Waesche who interdicted more than 37,000 pounds of cocaine worth

\$275 million earlier this month. I am also, though, saddened to hear that a crew member was lost at sea. So our thoughts and prayers are with their family and friends.

I think, Senator Cruz, you and I have introduced this bipartisan Coast Guard Reauthorization Act which would increase authorization levels and I hope that the Coast Guard's critical counter-narcotics mission and other missions will be bolstered in our efforts.

We need to do everything. As you have displayed here, if you leave a territory unaddressed that is where the drug will flow.

So attacking this at all levels is the right idea and so I look forward to working with you as we in this committee tackle the transportation networks that are threatening the lives of young individuals and many more Americans.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

I will now introduce the first panel. Joining us on the first panel today is Ms. Jena Ehlinger who was the mother of Jake Ehlinger of Texas. Ms. Ehlinger is a mom who turned unimaginable grief, the nightmare of every parent, into action after losing her son Jake to fentanyl poisoning in 2021.

Since then she has fought tirelessly to raise awareness about the dangers of fentanyl, to advocate for stronger drug policies, and to work to ensure that no other family has to endure the same devastating loss.

Our second witness is Mr. Kevin Hall, Chief of Police for the City of Spokane, and he has been on the front lines of the fight against the fentanyl crisis. Thank you, Chief, for your service.

Thank you both for being here. Ms. Ehlinger, you are recognized for five minutes, and I understand that you will be starting your testimony with a brief video.

**STATEMENT OF JENA EHLINGER, MOTHER OF JAKE  
EHLINGER OF TEXAS, A VICTIM OF FENTANYL POISONING**

[Video played.]

Ms. EHLINGER. Jake was just a bundle of love and joy and happy from the day he was born. He loved sports. He loved being outdoors.

He loved his friends. He had a very creative side. We all say he gave the best hugs, like, in the entire world, just big old bear hugs. He played football at the University of Texas.

Jake just had—he had a fire about him and it was a good way to, like, release that fire. He was a finance major in the school of McCombs when he passed away. His anxiety was pretty high the last probably year of his life and I think it was just the pressure of school and football.

We were in Mexico at a friend's daughter's wedding when I got the news that Jake had died. I was just in complete, utter shock. I mean, it is like an out of body experience because you just are, like, no, not my child. That cannot be right.

The problem is the medical examiners are coming in and they are finding someone dead. They know it is not suicide because it is obviously not suicide and so the only other box they have to check is accidental overdose.

And it is not an accidental overdose. It is poisoning. These young adults are buying these pills thinking they are getting one thing and they are getting something else.

I wish I could tell you that we found the person that sold it to Jake but we did not. Basically, the DEA and the police were, like, sorry, there is nothing we can do. We cannot help you.

We were so confused. Like, how in the world are people getting away with this, and, of course, my horror is if we do not do anything more and more kids are going to be dying every day.

And so what House Bill 6 does is anybody who is lacing drugs with fentanyl can now be charged and prosecuted including for murder. The facts that I wish the average parent knew about the dangers of fentanyl is do not think it will not be your kid.

I would have never in a million years dreamed that Jake would die of fentanyl poisoning. Like, this is happening every day to so many teenagers and young adults. Do not put your head in the sand and think there is no way this will happen in my family because it could.

[Video ends.]

Ms. EHLINGER. Good morning. My name is Jena Ehlinger. I never imagined that I would be on the front lines of a war I knew nothing about, and then I received the live-shattering call that my 20-year-old son Jake had been poisoned with fentanyl. This photo of Jake was taken 10 days before that call.

Jake grew up in Austin, Texas. He was a gifted athlete who also excelled in academics. With a score of 35 out of 36 on the ACT exam combined with his stellar high school grades and athleticism, Jake was recruited to play linebacker by a number of top tier universities including Stanford, Yale, Brown, Penn, and Dartmouth.

Jake passed on those incredible offers so that he could play football at his dream school, the University of Texas. His dad and I went to UT. His brother Sam was then UT's quarterback.

Jake wanted to play football with his brother on the team he had been an avid fan of his entire life. Jake was admitted into the McCombs School of Business as a finance major, became a member of the Texas Silver Spurs, and was a UT football player and a straight A student.

In the spring of 2021 as a sophomore he was looking forward to his upcoming summer internship at Dell, and his little sister Morgan joining him at UT in the fall.

On May 6, 2021, I received that horrific call. Jake had taken a counterfeit Xanax that had been laced with fentanyl. As with many things, until you have lived it the reality of such devastation is difficult to fully understand.

To our family's further devastation, when the death certificate was issued the DEA and the Austin police informed us that they were closing their investigation because the manner of death on the death certificate was classified as an accident.

Jake's death was not an accident. He was killed, literally poisoned to death. Labeling the poisoning and murder of my son as an accident resulted in the premature closing of Federal and local law enforcement investigations, ensured that no one will ever be arrested for poisoning and killing Jake, prevented the case from ever reaching a prosecutor's desk.

I hope no other families have to live through the additional nightmare that their child's killer will never be arrested or prosecuted because a medical examiner labeled their child's poisoning as an accident for statistical purposes.

Through my experience I learned that there were few to no consequences for murdering someone by poisoning them with a fentanyl-laced pill. Most laws address larger quantities of drugs, not the mere two milligrams of fentanyl that is considered a lethal dose.

As a result, those illegally manufacturing and distributing fentanyl remained on the streets and continued killing our children one pill at a time with little fear of prosecution.

Thankfully, with the help of friends we were able to pass a law in Texas addressing this vacuum in the law. Our legislation requires medical examiners to classify death from a fentanyl-laced substance as what it is, poisoning, and created a murder offense for the unlawful manufacture or distribution of fentanyl resulting in death including from just one pill.

Now in the state of Texas on the death certificate it is described as fentanyl poisoning, thereby keeping law enforcement investigations from prematurely closing, and illegally manufacturing or distributing a fentanyl-laced substance that results in death, even from one pill, may be prosecuted as murder and those poisoning Texans can no longer kill one pill at a time without fear of arrest and prosecution and are being taken off the streets. And other families may not have to live with the fact that no one will ever be prosecuted for killing their child or their loved one.

The law has been effective. Before this law there were no Texas state murder charges for deaths from one fentanyl-laced pill. In the first 8 months there were approximately 25 murder charges. To date, there have been nearly 60 murder charges.

But we are just one state. We need Federal laws to accomplish these goals and more nationwide including stopping the distribution of fentanyl in our country.

Senators, our country is at war and we are losing the war as evidenced by fentanyl becoming the number-one killer in the United States for ages 18 to 45. It impacts all races, religions, socioeconomic statuses, and political affiliations.

This lethal epidemic is killing young Americans and destroying families. I am just one mom who lost her precious son.

You are among the most powerful people in this country and there is no higher use of that power than to save someone's child and perhaps even your own.

Thank you for listening. God bless you all.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Ehlinger follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF JENA EHLINGER

My name is Jena Ehlinger.

I never imagined that I would be on the front lines of a war I knew nothing about. And then I received the life-shattering call that my 20-year-old son Jake had been poisoned with fentanyl. This photo of Jake was taken 10 days before that call.

Jake grew up in Austin, Texas. He was a gifted athlete who also excelled in academics. With a score of 35 out of 36 on the ACT exam combined with his stellar high school grades and athleticism, Jake was recruited to play linebacker by a number of top-tier universities, including Stanford, Yale, Brown, Penn, and Dartmouth.

Jake passed on these incredible offers so he could play football at his dream school, The University of Texas. His dad and I went to UT and his brother, Sam, was then UT's quarterback. Jake wanted to play football with his brother on the team he had been an avid fan of his entire life.

Jake was admitted into the McCombs School of Business as a finance major, became a member of the Texas Silver Spurs, was a UT football player, and a straight A student. In the spring of 2021, as a sophomore, he was looking forward to his upcoming summer internship at Dell and his little sister Morgan joining him at UT in the fall.

On May 6, 2021, I received that horrific call. Jake had taken a counterfeit Xanax that had been laced with fentanyl. As with many things, until you have lived it, the reality of such devastation is difficult to fully understand.

To our family's further devastation, when the death certificate was issued, the DEA and the Austin Police informed us that they were closing their investigations because the "manner of death" on the death certificate was classified as an "Accident". Jake's death was not an accident. He was killed—literally poisoned to death.

Labeling the poisoning and murder of my son as an "Accident":

- (1) resulted in the premature closing of Federal and local law enforcement investigations;
- (2) ensured that no one will ever be arrested for poisoning and killing Jake; and
- (3) prevented the case from ever reaching a prosecutor's desk.

I hope no other families have to live through the additional nightmare that their child's killers will never be arrested or prosecuted because a medical examiner labeled their child's poisoning an "Accident" for statistical purposes.

Through my experience, I learned that there were few to no consequences for murdering someone by poisoning them with a fentanyl-laced pill. Most laws address larger quantities of drugs, not the mere 2 milligrams of fentanyl that is considered a lethal dose. As a result, those illegally manufacturing and distributing fentanyl remained on the streets and continued killing our children—one pill at a time—with little fear of prosecution.

Thankfully, with the help of friends, we were able to pass a law in Texas addressing this vacuum in the law. Our legislation requires medical examiners to classify death from a fentanyl-laced substance as what it is—poisoning—and created a murder offense for the unlawful manufacture or distribution of fentanyl resulting in death, including from just one pill. Now, in Texas:

- on the death certificate, it is described as "fentanyl poisoning" thereby keeping law enforcement investigations from prematurely closing;
- illegally manufacturing or distributing a fentanyl-laced substance that results in death—even from one pill—may be prosecuted as murder;
- those poisoning Texans can no longer kill one pill at a time without fear of arrest and prosecution and are being taken off the streets; and
- other families may not have to live with the fact that no one will ever be prosecuted for killing their child or loved one.

The law has been effective. Before this law, there were no Texas state murder charges for deaths from one fentanyl-laced pill. In the first eight months, there were approximately 25 murder charges. To date, there have been nearly 60 murder charges.

But we are just one state. We need Federal laws to accomplish these goals and more nationwide, including stopping the distribution of fentanyl in our country.

Senators, our country is at war and are losing the war, as evidenced by fentanyl becoming the number one killer in the U.S. for ages 18–45. It impacts all races, religions, socioeconomic statuses, and political affiliations. This lethal epidemic is killing young Americans and destroying families. I am just one mom who lost her precious son. You are among the most powerful people in this country. There is no higher use of that power than to save someone's child and perhaps even your own.

Thank you for listening.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Ehlinger. Thank you for the difference you are making in our home state of Texas and thank you for speaking to the American people today, and I hope that Congress hears your words today.

Ms. EHLINGER. Thank you.  
The CHAIRMAN. Chief Hall.



**STATEMENT OF KEVIN HALL,  
CHIEF OF SPOKANE POLICE DEPARTMENT**

Mr. HALL. Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the fentanyl crisis, an issue of national urgency that devastates communities across the country including my own in Spokane, Washington.

My name is Kevin Hall. I am honored to serve as Police Chief for the City of Spokane, the second largest city in the state of Washington.

I was appointed to the position in August 2024 after previously serving more than 32 years in the Tucson Police Department in Tucson, Arizona, the last nearly 8 years as assistant chief.

My 33-year career in policing has focused on violent crime, addressing the impacts of drugs and drug trafficking on public safety at both local and national levels.

Since 2019 the annual number of opioid drug overdoses has doubled in Washington State, and Spokane's opioid deaths have surpassed the state's average.

Recent reports by the CDC and DEA illustrating national declines in fatal drug overdoses are not the reality in Washington State. The Spokane Fire Department's calls for overdoses have increased 30 percent in 2024 over the previous year.

Like every other urban police agency in the country, the Spokane Police Department continues to allocate more and more resources to address open-air drug use, fatal drug overdoses, and the overall harm caused to the community by fentanyl.

The Spokane County medical examiner reported at least 346 opioid related deaths last year, over 75 percent involving fentanyl. The economic toll is staggering. The Senate's Joint Economic Committee estimated the opioid crisis cost the U.S. \$1.5 trillion in 2020 alone.

Fentanyl's impact stems from its potency—40 to 50 times more lethal than heroin—and its alarming accessibility. From my experience in southern Arizona I know that most fentanyl enters the U.S. through legal ports of entry, concealed in commercial cargo trucks, passenger vehicles, trailers, and RVs.

Recent seizures highlight the scale of trafficking along transportation routes. In Tucson law enforcement intercepted 1.7 million fentanyl pills in just two stops in late 2024.

Spokane's supply chain follows similar patterns, moving drugs from Mexico along interstates I-19, I-10, and I-5 before reaching eastern Washington via I-90. Spokane officers have recently encountered bulk powder fentanyl, an emerging and highly dangerous trend.

Fentanyl trafficking has direct and violent consequences. A harrowing example of this occurred in Spokane when an investigation where traffickers using I-90 transported bulk fentanyl pill loads to Spokane from the Tri-Cities area.

Spokane PD and Federal partners, after an intensive investigation, interdicted the trafficker, resulting in a violent midday shootout with Spokane police officers that endangered innocents including small children who were in the area. Two thousand fentanyl pills were seized from the car that the suspect was traveling in.

Elsewhere in Washington drug traffickers have used commercial trucks, passenger rail and even commercial airlines, as seen in a 2023 investigation at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport where 400,000 fentanyl pills were found in checked baggage.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security estimated that drug traffickers were bringing millions of pills a month into the Seattle region via drug couriers' checked luggage.

Another separate investigation in Seattle in the fall 2024 culminated in the arrest of 12 violent fentanyl traffickers, the seizure of significant amounts of fentanyl, dozens of weapons, and highlighted what effective Federal and local law enforcement partnerships look like with the Department of Homeland Security, Seattle Police Department, U.S. Attorney General's Office, among the agencies involved.

This investigation directly stemmed from the previously mentioned checked baggage investigation at Sea-Tac Airport. Interdicting fentanyl requires strong partnerships between local, state, Federal, and tribal agencies.

We must enhance these collaborations with improved technology and resources. That is why I respectfully urge Congress to pass the Stop Smuggling Illicit Synthetic Drugs on U.S. Transportation Networks Act.

This legislation would expand nonintrusive inspection technologies such as drive-through and mobile X-ray sensors, specialized canine resources, vapor technology to strengthen our ability to detect and disrupt fentanyl trafficking before it reaches our streets.

The fight against fentanyl is urgent. It is real. Strengthening our enforcement capabilities will save lives.

Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hall follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF KEVIN HALL, CHIEF OF POLICE, CITY OF SPOKANE

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing and for your attention to a topic that has impacted countless families across the country and in the communities I serve. The fentanyl crisis is one of national importance and national urgency.

My name is Kevin Hall, and I am honored to serve as Police Chief for the City of Spokane, the second largest City in the State of Washington. I was appointed to the position in August of 2024 after previously serving more than 32 years in the Tucson Police Department in patrol, investigations, SWAT, and nearly 8 years as Assistant Chief. I also serve as Co-chair of the Research Advisory Committee for the International Chiefs of Police; I'm a graduate of the Major Cities Chief's Association Police Executive Leadership Institute, the Police Executive Research Forum's Senior Management Institute for Police, the Harvard Kennedy School of Government Senior Executives in State & Local Government and I am proud to be an inductee in the Evidence-Based Policing Hall of Fame.

Since 2019, the annual number of opioid drug overdoses has doubled in Washington State, and Spokane's opioid deaths have surpassed the state's average.<sup>1</sup> Recent reports by the CDC and DEA illustrating national declines in fatal drug overdoses are not the reality in Washington state. The Spokane Fire Department's calls for overdoses have increased 30 percent in 2024 over the previous year.<sup>2</sup> Like every other police agency in the country, the Spokane Police Department continues to allocate more and more resources to address open-air drug use, fatal drug overdoses, and the overall harm caused to the community by fentanyl. A recent Spokane County Medical Examiner Report concluded that at least 346 individuals died

<sup>1</sup> See *Opioid and Drug Overdose Data* | Washington State Department of Health.

<sup>2</sup> *Anecdotally, we're seeing more dead people.*—RANGE Media.

of an opioid-related overdose last year, with fentanyl accounting for over 75 percent of those deaths.<sup>3</sup> The cost of fentanyl is devastating both individually and collectively. The Senate’s Joint Economic Committee previously estimated that in 2020 alone, the opioid epidemic cost the country roughly 1.5 *trillion* dollars.<sup>4</sup>

The scale of fentanyl’s impact is in part due to the potency of the drug—40 to 50 times more lethal and addictive than heroin—as well as its accessibility and street price.<sup>5</sup> From my 32 years of policing in southern Arizona, in a city 60 miles north of the international border with Mexico, I know that the vast majority of fentanyl enters this country through legal ports of entry, often concealed in commercial cargo trucks, RVs, trailers, and cars. Let me be clear: this traffic represents a mere fraction of the vehicles coming into the United States from Mexico for legal purposes every day.

Nevertheless, the Tucson Police Department, in partnership with their Federal partners, frequently seizes hundreds of pounds of fentanyl. In November of 2024, Tucson PD, in conjunction with the Southern Arizona HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) group, seized 1.1 million illicit fentanyl pills that were hidden in a Dodge Charger.<sup>6</sup> This car crossed the international border and traveled north on I-19 and then I-10, where it was intercepted in Tucson. In a similar example, in October of 2024, a stop on a vehicle that took the same route resulted in a seizure of 600,000 fentanyl pills. 1.7 million pills in two non-descript sedans traveling on America’s highways, nearly unimpeded.

The fentanyl not seized by law enforcement at or near the border travels along transportation networks using passenger buses and rail, but most commonly cars and trucks on major interstates throughout the country, routes commonly policed by state, county, and local law enforcement.

For instance, we know from collaborative investigations with state and Federal partners that fentanyl in Spokane enters the U.S. from Mexico, travels up along interstates I-10 and I-5, and makes its way to Eastern Washington via the Tri-Cities. The major transportation artery into eastern Washington and northern Idaho is I-90, which represents the most significant pathway for fentanyl into Spokane and northern Idaho.

Spokane area law enforcement have recently seized pounds of powder fentanyl, a new phenomenon where pills are being replaced by bulk powder fentanyl. A harrowing example of fentanyl trafficking in Spokane involved an investigation where traffickers, utilizing I-90, transported bulk fentanyl pill loads to Spokane from the Tri-Cities area. Spokane PD, after an intensive investigation, interdicted the trafficker, resulting in a violent, mid-day shootout with Spokane Police officers that endangered innocents, including small children in the area.<sup>7</sup> Two thousand fentanyl pills were seized from the car the suspect was traveling in. The spin-off investigation from this shooting resulted in a seizure of over 60 pounds of methamphetamine and over 500,000 fentanyl pills.

In 2024, the Burien Police Department and King County Sheriff’s Office on the west side of Washington state seized more than 1 million dollars in fentanyl, meth, and heroin that were smuggled in a commercial truck.<sup>8</sup> According to charging documents, the drug traffickers transported hundreds of pounds of drugs in a semi-truck on regular trips from southern California to Washington State.

We also know that drugs are smuggled in through commercial airlines, requiring sophisticated collaboration between local, state, and Federal law enforcement partners to track and intercept them successfully. One such example occurred in January 2023, when federal, state, and local law enforcement conducted a bust at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport SEATAC airport and found more than 400,000 fentanyl pills in checked luggage of drug couriers.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimated that drug traffickers were bringing millions of pills a month into the Seattle region via drug couriers’ checked luggage. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (SEA), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Port of Seattle police, and other local law enforcement agencies worked together to interdict these drugs.

<sup>3</sup>Most overdose deaths in Spokane County among housed, employed adults, according to new report | News | kxly.com.

<sup>4</sup>JEC Analysis Finds Opioid Epidemic Cost U.S. Nearly \$1.5 Trillion in 2020—JEC Analysis Finds Opioid Epidemic Cost U.S. Nearly \$1.5 Trillion in 2020—United States Joint Economic Committee (senate.gov).

<sup>5</sup>See Fentanyl Facts | Stop Overdose | CDC.

<sup>6</sup>Tucson Police help recover over 1.1 million fentanyl pills in traffic stop

<sup>7</sup>Spokane drug agents seize press capable of making 17,000 fentanyl pills an hour.

<sup>8</sup>Drugs worth \$2.49 million, \$46K in cash and gun recovered in Burien bust.

<sup>9</sup>See VIDEO: KIRO 7 Investigates packing drugs in checked luggage—KIRO 7 News Seattle.

I appreciate this Committee's support for the partnerships that are critical to the work we do on the ground. Without the cooperation of federal, tribal, state, and local agencies, and private sector partners, the problem would be even worse. But I also know that we can work together to strengthen these key partnerships and produce better outcomes for the people we all serve.

To that end, I urge Congress to pass the Stop Smuggling Illicit Synthetic Drugs on U.S. Transportation Networks Act. This legislation would leverage precious Federal resources to develop and provide non-intrusive technologies and canines to conduct inspections of cargo transported via civil aircraft, passenger and freight rail, commercial motor vehicles, and maritime vessels. By improving the detection and interception of fentanyl at the border and along routes of interstate commerce, this legislation will help choke supply and mitigate the devastating downstream consumption of fentanyl. This is exactly the kind of initiative that we need to strengthen the partnership between local, state, federal, and tribal law enforcement in the fight against fentanyl and the smuggling of illicit drugs into our communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Chief.

Ms. Ehlinger, I am going to start with you. Thank you for coming and telling us about your son Jake. As a father my heart breaks for you.

You have gone through a nightmare that every parent, every grandparent, is terrified of experiencing. You have done an enormous amount in Texas to help prevent more tragic deaths.

What advice can you give to parents who might want to make a difference preventing future fentanyl poisonings?

Ms. EHLINGER. The first thing I would say is that—talk to your kids about drugs. Use the word fentanyl. Do not be afraid to talk about it. Share statistics. Explain how dangerous it is compared to when we were growing up, and also I would say for kids that, you know, may have a lot of pressure on them.

Kids in our society have a higher rate of anxiety than ever before and to take the stigma away of it is OK if you need help.

Like, if you feel like you need some counseling or whatever that is that it is OK to ask for some help and do not turn to a counterfeit, you know, drug to try to make you feel better.

The CHAIRMAN. An illustration that a DEA agent told me in Texas of just the potency of fentanyl is he took a Sweet & Low packet. He said, tear it open and empty the contents out so that there is nothing in it. And then he said, stick your finger inside the packet and remove your finger, and you have a couple of little tiny specks of Sweet & Low.

Ms. EHLINGER. Exactly.

The CHAIRMAN. That is enough fentanyl to kill you. I can tell you I have done that with our girls and tried to convey the point but you are terrified that a teenager, a young adult at one party, somebody gives them some stupid pill and that is their last moment on Earth.

Through your hard work the Texas penal code now criminalizes the delivery or manufacture of fentanyl that results in death, and the code requires medical examiners to properly classify fentanyl poisoning deaths.

As you noted, over 60 drug peddlers have already been charged in Texas with murder since the law went into effect.

Have you spoken with others in Texas about what these changes have meant to them when the tragedy of fentanyl poisoning occurs and what have they told you?

Ms. EHLINGER. Yes. I mean, unfortunately, I have made a lot of new friends because of this tragedy. Pain is a really strong motivator and there is—any time there is a fentanyl death, you know, whatever the seven degrees of separation—I mean, somebody will ask me, can you talk to this person—they just lost their child to fentanyl and I am, like, absolutely.

Send me their phone number and I can literally pull up my phone and just type in fentanyl and 30 names of people I never knew before come up in my phone.

They are extremely thankful. It is a very motivated group of people, as you can imagine—parents that have lost their children, probably one of the most motivated group of people.

And there is also—just in Austin alone there is a group called Angel Moms and there is probably 60 of these mothers who have lost their children to fentanyl and that is in Austin, Texas, only.

The CHAIRMAN. Wow. In the video you played you said that you were unable to determine who sold the drugs to your son Jake. In the last Congress I passed legislation called the TRANQ Act to help improve the technology for detecting and identifying fentanyl and other related drugs, and Senator Cantwell and I are now working on new legislation in this space.

How important is it for families to have the technology in place to track the origins and pathways that these drugs travel into the country?

Ms. EHLINGER. I think it is extremely important. I mean, yes, shockingly, the DEA could not open Jake's phone to retrieve any information to find anyone responsible. My understanding is that these young adults are buying these counterfeit pills, thinking they are getting one thing, and getting killed through social media platforms like Snapchat and things like that.

So I know that is how they are coming through, and then I also know that they are also being delivered through rideshare apps. So there is definitely a problem between all of the different social media and technology applications that these young adults use and have their hands on not understanding the dangers of them.

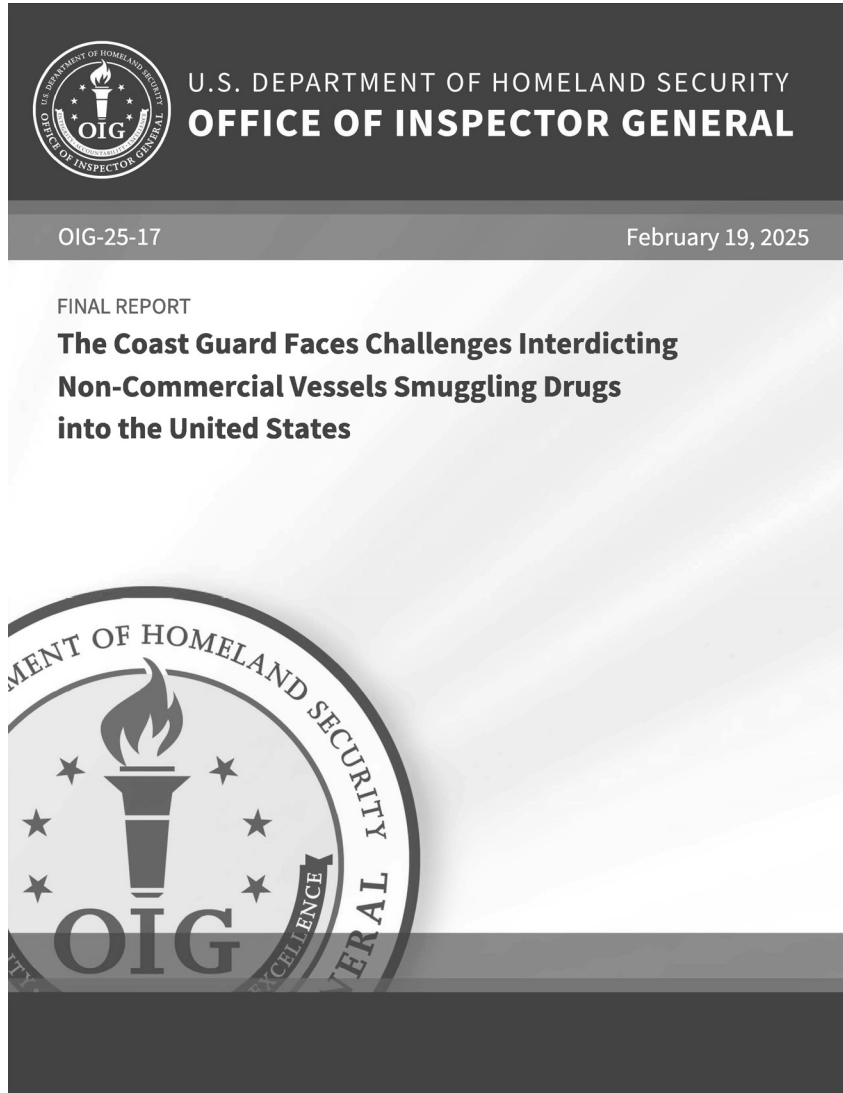
The CHAIRMAN. The record illegal immigration flows during the Biden administration have clearly taken a toll on the Coast Guard's counterdrug mission and so I am going to submit to the hearing record a DHS Office of Inspector General report entitled "The Coast Guard faces challenges interdicting noncommercial vessels smuggling drugs into the United States."

This report notes that the Coast Guard did not meet its cocaine interdiction goals because it did not have enough cutters available to perform the counterdrug mission. Those cutters had been diverted to interdict illegal immigrants.

The DHS OIG estimated that the Coast Guard could have interdicted up to an additional 89 metric tons of cocaine had those cutters been performing the counterdrug mission.

And without objection, so ordered entered into the record.

[The information referred to follows:]




**OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

 Washington, DC 20528 | [www.oig.dhs.gov](http://www.oig.dhs.gov)

February 19, 2025

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** Admiral Kevin E. Lunday  
 Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Commandant  
 U.S. Coast Guard

**FROM:** Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D.  
 Inspector General

**SUBJECT:** *The Coast Guard Faces Challenges Interdicting Non-Commercial Vessels Smuggling Drugs into the United States*

**JOSEPH V  
CUFFARI**

 Digitally signed by  
 JOSEPH V CUFFARI  
 Date: 2025.02.19  
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Attached for your action is our final report, *The Coast Guard Faces Challenges Interdicting Non-Commercial Vessels Smuggling Drugs into the United States*. We incorporated the formal comments provided by your office.

The report contains four recommendations aimed at improving the Coast Guard's ability to interdict non-commercial vessels smuggling drugs into the United States. Your office concurred with three recommendations. Based on information provided in your response to the draft report, we consider recommendation 1 open and unresolved. As prescribed by Department of Homeland Security Directive 077-01, *Follow-Up and Resolutions for the Office of Inspector General Report Recommendations*, within 90 days of the date of this memorandum, please provide our office with a written response that includes your (1) agreement or disagreement, (2) corrective action plan, and (3) target completion date for the recommendation. Also, please include responsible parties and any other supporting documentation necessary to inform us about the current status of the recommendation. Until your response is received and evaluated, the recommendation will be considered open and unresolved.

Based on information provided in your response to the draft report, we consider recommendations 2 through 4 open and resolved. Once your office has fully implemented the recommendations, please submit a formal closeout letter to us within 30 days so that we may close the recommendations. The memorandum should be accompanied by evidence of completion of agreed-upon corrective actions and of the disposition of any monetary amounts.

Please send your response or closure request to [OIGAuditsFollowup@oig.dhs.gov](mailto:OIGAuditsFollowup@oig.dhs.gov).

Consistent with our responsibility under the *Inspector General Act*, we will provide copies of our report to congressional committees with oversight and appropriation responsibility over the Department of Homeland Security. We will post the report on our website for public dissemination.

Please contact me with any questions, or your staff may contact Kristen Bernard, Deputy Inspector General for Audits, at (202) 981-6000.

Attachment





## DHS OIG HIGHLIGHTS

### *The Coast Guard Faces Challenges Interdicting Non-Commercial Vessels Smuggling Drugs into the United States*

February 19, 2025

#### Why We Did This Audit

Drug trafficking from overseas sources threatens the security of the United States. The Coast Guard is responsible for interdicting and apprehending persons and vessels suspected of drug trafficking in the maritime environment. The Coast Guard's counterdrug mission aims to reduce the supply of illicit substances in the United States by disrupting the flow of cocaine and other illegal drugs. We conducted this audit to determine to what extent the Coast Guard interdicts non-commercial vessels smuggling drugs into the United States.

#### What We Recommend

We made four recommendations to improve the Coast Guard's efforts to interdict non-commercial vessels smuggling drugs into the United States.

##### For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202) 981-6000, or email us at: [DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov](mailto:DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov).

#### What We Found

The United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard) was not able to consistently interdict non-commercial vessels smuggling drugs into the United States. From fiscal years 2021 through 2023, the Coast Guard interdicted an estimated 421.9 metric tons of cocaine but fell short of its total cocaine removal goal of 690 metric tons. This occurred, in part, because the Coast Guard did not always have cutters available to perform the counterdrug mission and did not have a contingency plan to address the cutters' unavailability. We found Coast Guard cutters were unavailable for 2,058 cumulative days over a 3-year period. Using the Coast Guard's formula, we calculated that the Coast Guard could have interdicted an additional 57 to 89.1 metric tons of cocaine had these cutters been performing the counterdrug mission.

Additionally, the Coast Guard did not accurately record all drug interdictions in its system of record. From FYs 2021 through 2023, 156 of the 271 (58 percent) counterdrug casefiles in our statistical sample did not contain seizure results, and 185 of 271 (68 percent) did not contain required documentation. This occurred because Coast Guard commanding officers and district personnel did not consistently conduct supervisory reviews to ensure information was accurately captured. Lastly, the Coast Guard made limited progress transitioning its Digital Evidence Search and Seizure program from the pilot program to a mission requirement because it did not conduct an analysis to determine what is needed for the program.

Without addressing these issues, the Coast Guard may be missing opportunities to stop the illicit flow of drugs coming into the United States.

#### Coast Guard Response

The Coast Guard did not concur with recommendation 1, but concurred with recommendations 2, 3, and 4. Appendix B contains the Coast Guard's management comments in their entirety.



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### Background

Drug trafficking from overseas sources threatens the security of the United States. The United States has 95,000 miles of coastal waters and more than 300 ports handling passenger and cargo movements, providing ample opportunities for bad actors to smuggle illegal drugs into the country. According to United States Coast Guard (Coast Guard) officials, the total known non-commercial maritime cocaine flow from fiscal years 2021 through 2023 was 7,924 metric tons. See Table 1 for a breakdown of known non-commercial maritime cocaine flow.

**Table 1. FY 2021–2023 Known Non-Commercial Maritime Cocaine Flow**

| Fiscal Year  | Metric Tons of Cocaine |
|--------------|------------------------|
| 2021         | 2,483                  |
| 2022         | 2,848                  |
| 2023         | 2,593                  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>7,924</b>           |

Source: DHS OIG analysis of Coast Guard data

Most of these drugs are carried by non-commercial vessels<sup>1</sup> such as small “go-fast” vessels (see Figure 1), semisubmersible vessels, fishing vessels, and sailing vessels through the Maritime Transit Zone.<sup>2</sup> This trade in illicit drugs poses a significant threat to our national security and helps fund transnational criminal organizations.

**Figure 1. Go-Fast Vessel Interdicted by the United States Coast Guard**



Source: Photo from a Coast Guard press release

<sup>1</sup> “Non-commercial vessel” means any seagoing vessel whose primary use is not the commercial transportation of passengers or freight, fishing, or dredging.

<sup>2</sup> The Maritime Transit Zone is a 6 million square mile transit zone between the United States and drug-producing countries. This area includes the Caribbean Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Eastern Pacific. We note that, after OIG’s period of review for this audit ended, Executive Order 14172, *Restoring Names that Honor American Greatness*, directed the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico to the “Gulf of America.” See Exec. Order 14172 at Section 4(b) (January 20, 2025).



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Within the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard enforces all applicable Federal laws on the high seas subject to the jurisdiction of the United States,<sup>3</sup> including interdicting and apprehending persons and vessels suspected of drug trafficking. **The Coast Guard's** counterdrug mission aims to reduce the supply of illicit substances in the United States by disrupting the flow of cocaine and other illegal drugs.<sup>4</sup>

According to Coast Guard officials, the Coast Guard primarily focuses its interdiction efforts on cocaine because it is the most profitable and primary drug smuggled throughout the Maritime Transit Zone and the smuggling funds a range of transnational criminal organization activities. At-sea interdictions of cocaine are the most effective way to limit transnational criminal organizations from trafficking their entire spectrum of illicit products. The Coast Guard leverages a fleet of cutters and boats, maritime patrol aircrafts, and helicopters, as well as international and domestic partnerships in a layered approach to interdict bulk quantities of drugs at sea. The Coast Guard also deploys Law Enforcement Detachments<sup>5</sup> on U.S. Navy and allied ships. Figure 2 depicts more than 12,100 pounds of cocaine worth more than \$160 million that was interdicted in September 2023.



Source: Photo from Coast Guard press release

The Coast Guard uses the Marine Information for Safety and Law Enforcement (MISLE) system to record the results of at-sea interdictions, including the total drugs seized and any supporting documentation. **MISLE is the Coast Guard's comprehensive law enforcement case management system** for evaluating the effectiveness of operations and the use of Coast Guard resources.

Intelligence collected during at-sea interdictions offers insight into transnational criminal organization networks. The Coast Guard's Digital Evidence Search and Seizure (DESS) program enables trained DESS operators and boarding officers to conduct imaging and at-

<sup>3</sup> 14 U.S.C. § 102.

<sup>4</sup> **The Coast Guard works directly with the Department of Defense's Joint Interagency Task Force – South** on its counterdrug mission. The joint task force consists of the U.S. Military, 13 U.S. interagency partners, research and academia, and foreign partners working to detect and monitor illegal drug shipments in the Maritime Transit Zone.

<sup>5</sup> Law Enforcement Detachments are deployable specialized forces that enforce U.S. laws and treaties in the maritime domain. They deploy on U.S. Navy and Allied ships that transit a counter drug area to provide federal maritime law enforcement capability not otherwise available to the ship.



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sea searches of certain electronic devices, such as cellular phones, radios, thumb drives, computers, global positioning systems, electronic navigation systems, and encryption devices. These devices search for intelligence, such as drop off locations, call records, or phone numbers to further the investigation. Decisionmakers then use these time-sensitive DESS search results to determine where best to place resources for operational needs. According to Coast Guard officials, from FYs 2021 through 2023, the DESS program led to the seizure of 13,541 kilograms of its total cocaine seized.

We conducted this audit to determine to what extent the Coast Guard interdicts non-commercial vessels smuggling drugs into the United States.

### Results of Audit

#### **The Coast Guard Did Not Meet Its Cocaine Removal Goals for Non-Commercial Vessels Smuggling Drugs into the United States from FY 2021 to FY 2023**

The Coast Guard fell short of its performance goals for drug seizures between FYs 2021 and 2023. The Coast Guard assesses the overall effectiveness of its counterdrug mission using two performance goals: 1) the removal rate of cocaine from non-commercial vessels in the Maritime Transit Zone and 2) metric tons of cocaine removed. The Coast Guard regularly reviews its performance and sets goals annually based on historical information, observed trends, intelligence products, changes in each mission area, and changes to the budget impacting mission performance. The cocaine removal rate measures the percentage of documented non-commercial maritime cocaine flow removed by the Coast Guard. The metric tons of cocaine removed is the sum of all cocaine that is removed by Coast Guard personnel and all cocaine lost by transnational criminal organizations due to the Coast Guard's actions.

For FYs 2021 and 2022, the Coast Guard set goals of a 10 percent cocaine removal rate and 240 metric tons of cocaine removed.<sup>6</sup> In FY 2023, after conducting an analysis of forecasted cocaine flow using 10 years of historical data, the Coast Guard lowered its goals to a 7.5 percent cocaine removal rate and 210 metric tons of cocaine removed.<sup>7</sup>

Based on our review of data from the Department of Defense Consolidated Counterdrug Database, the Coast Guard did not meet its cocaine removal goals for FYs 2021 through 2023 even after reducing its goals by 2.5 percent and 30 metric tons. The Coast Guard removed a total of 421.9 metric tons of cocaine across this 3-year period, falling short of the combined cocaine removal goal of 690 metric tons. The amount removed decreased each year to

<sup>6</sup> Coast Guard's *FY 2019-2024 Future Year Homeland Security Program Performance Targets*.

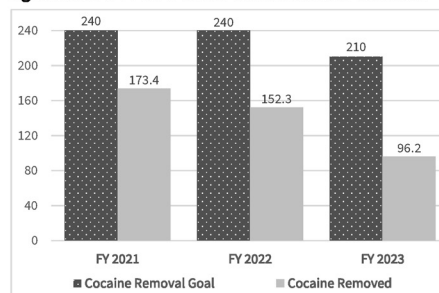
<sup>7</sup> Coast Guard's *FY 2023-2024 Strategic Planning Direction*, July 30, 2022.



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approximately 96.2 metric tons in FY 2023 — 113.8 metric tons short of the Coast Guard's reduced goal of 210 metric tons that year. This resulted in a 3.71 percent cocaine removal rate,<sup>8</sup> which was less than half of the reduced goal of 7.5 percent. See Figure 3 for the difference between the Coast Guard's established targets for its cocaine removal goal and its actual performance.

**Figure 3. FY 2021–2023 Metric Tons of Cocaine Removed**



Source: DHS Office of Inspector General analysis of data from the Department of Defense Consolidated Counterdrug Database

We found that the Coast Guard did not meet its goals because it did not always have cutters available to perform the counterdrug mission. The Coast Guard relies on its National Security cutters, Medium endurance cutters, and Fast Response cutters to conduct counterdrug operations. As of September 2023, the Coast Guard had 90 different cutters available within these classes. However, 39 of the Coast Guard cutters assigned to the counterdrug mission missed a cumulative 2,058 days from FYs 2021 through 2023 because they were reallocated to the Coast Guard's migrant interdiction mission, had unscheduled maintenance, or were not operable due to COVID-19 protocols. The number of days the cutters were unavailable increased each year from FYs 2021 to 2023, which directly correlates with the decrease in cocaine removals for those years. See Table 2 for a breakdown of the number of unavailable days by reason.

<sup>8</sup> The cocaine removal rate for FY 2023 was calculated by dividing the 96.2 metric tons of cocaine removed by the total known non-commercial maritime cocaine flow of 2,593 metric tons.



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**Table 2. FY 2021–2023 Coast Guard Cutter Unavailability Days**

| Reason for Cutter Unavailability | FY 2021    | FY 2022    | FY 2023      | Total        |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Migrant Interdiction             | 31         | 158        | 432          | 621          |
| Unscheduled Maintenance          | 357        | 320        | 625          | 1,302        |
| COVID-19 Protocols               | 24         | 111        | -            | 135          |
| <b>Total Unavailable Days</b>    | <b>412</b> | <b>589</b> | <b>1,057</b> | <b>2,058</b> |

Source: DHS OIG analysis of Coast Guard cutter availability information

According to Coast Guard personnel, many of the cutters scheduled for the counterdrug mission were reassigned to the migrant crisis, thus reducing the number of cutters available in the maritime transit zone, and negatively impacting cocaine removals. Coast Guard personnel also attributed these issues to deferred maintenance. Coast Guard personnel said that insufficient funding for maintenance and repairs has reduced cutter availability, and that the more maintenance periods that are deferred in the short term, the more downtime is needed for maintenance and repair in the long term. Coast Guard personnel also stated that more cutters would help to meet its counterdrug goal. The U.S. Government Accountability Office previously reported on asset challenges impacting Coast Guard's law enforcement mission, which includes its counterdrug efforts.<sup>9</sup>

Further, in FY 2021 cutters faced a 14-day restriction of movement every time COVID-19 protocols were triggered. These protocols included precautions to prevent outbreaks among the cutter crews, impacting cutter availability. In FY 2022, cutter deployments were no longer reduced by restriction of movement periods, but quarantine or isolation requirements rendered some units unavailable.

Lastly, we found that the Coast Guard did not have a contingency plan to improve availability of cutters. A contingency plan would address asset availability issues, such as the risks to the counterdrug mission, the impacts of those risks, triggers for plan activation, response procedures, team member responsibilities, and communication protocols. According to Coast Guard officials, a contingency plan was not necessary because they rely on the Global Force Management process to make decisions. The Global Force Management process includes asset planning across the Coast Guard's missions and includes a strategic review, which identifies specific areas where risks exist and highlights contingency plans for those areas. However, we determined the Global Force Management process does not identify asset availability for its counterdrug mission.

<sup>9</sup> *Asset, Workforce, and Technology Challenges Continue to Affect Law Enforcement Missions*, GAO-24-107144, November 2023.



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Using the Coast Guard's formula, we estimated that the Coast Guard missed opportunities to interdict 57 to 89.1 metric tons of additional cocaine from FYs 2021 through 2023,<sup>10</sup> amounts that would have helped the Coast Guard better meet its drug interdiction goals. See Table 3 for a breakdown of estimated cocaine missed by fiscal year.

**Table 3. FY 2021–2023 Estimates of Missed Drug Interdictions**

| Missed Drug Estimates       | FY 2021 | FY 2022 | FY 2023 | Total |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Low Estimate (Metric Tons)  | 6       | 14.3    | 36.7    | 57    |
| High Estimate (Metric Tons) | 7.7     | 29.8    | 51.6    | 89.1  |

Source: DHS OIG analysis of Coast Guard data

**The Coast Guard Did Not Accurately Capture Drug Interdictions in MISLE**

According to *the U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Law Enforcement Manual (COMDTINST M16247.1H)*, dated November 20, 2020, a law enforcement action is incomplete until it is properly reported and documented. Additionally, per the *MISLE Boarding User Guide*, dated March 23, 2020, whenever the Coast Guard finds a violation or discrepancy after boarding a vessel, Coast Guard personnel must scan and attach all supporting documentation from the boarding in MISLE. This documentation includes the Report of Boarding, Form CG-4100, which documents the results of the law enforcement action taken, including any violations and arrests, and a written summary of the boarding results.

We found the Coast Guard did not accurately document the results of all counterdrug interdictions or upload required supporting documents into MISLE. We reviewed a statistical sample of 271 out of 918 counterdrug casefiles within the MISLE system for FYs 2021 through 2023 and identified that 156 of 271 (58 percent) were missing required information, such as the types and amounts of seized drugs. Moreover, 185 of the 271 (68 percent) did not contain the required Report of Boarding, Form CG-4100. Based on this analysis of our statistical sample, we estimate with 95 percent confidence that between 50.1 percent and 65.1 percent of the total counterdrug casefiles in MISLE did not include the results of the interdiction and that between 61.2 percent and 75.3 percent of the casefiles did not contain supporting documentation from the boarding.

This occurred because Coast Guard commanding officers and district personnel did not perform reviews to ensure all interdiction information was accurately captured and

<sup>10</sup> The Coast Guard uses a formula to calculate the potential cocaine lost due to non-mission-capable days. We used this formula to calculate estimates for the total cocaine lost due to cutter unavailability for FYs 2021 through 2023.



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supporting documentation was included in casefiles. We identified that 239 of the 271 (88 percent) counterdrug casefiles were not reviewed by commanding officers. Also, 241 of the 271 (89 percent) were not reviewed at the district level. According to Coast Guard officials, MISLE does not prevent cases from being closed without reviews by commanding officers and district personnel. This allows the Coast Guard to close a law enforcement case in the MISLE system without verifying that the results are accurately recorded.

Consequently, the Coast Guard may be using inaccurate information to evaluate the effectiveness of its operations and make current and future strategic or tactical decisions. Basing decisions on inaccurate information could, in turn, **hurt the Coast Guard's ability to** interdict drugs and respond to the evolving threats presented by transnational criminal organization drug smuggling.

**The Coast Guard Did Not Identify or Acquire the Resources Needed to Implement Its Digital Evidence Search and Seizure Program**

The Coast Guard piloted the DESS program to enhance the timeliness and access of electronic-derived intelligence gathered from boardings. On July 18, 2023, the Coast Guard issued the *Digital Evidence Search and Seizure Maritime Law Enforcement/Intelligence Mission Needs Memorandum*, transitioning DESS from a pilot program to a mission requirement. According to the memorandum, every Coast Guard cutter and Law Enforcement Detachment deployed to the Maritime Transit Zone must have a DESS kit<sup>11</sup> on board. The program must also have access to a pool of certified operators, and DESS-derived data must be housed in a centralized data storage system that allows Coast Guard intelligence entities to store and access it for further coordination.

The Coast Guard made limited progress transitioning DESS from the pilot program to a mission requirement. As of September 26, 2023, the Coast Guard had 90 cutters available to conduct the counterdrug mission.<sup>12</sup> Yet, in FY 2024, the Coast Guard had just 10 available DESS kits to collect intelligence during at-sea interdictions. According to Coast Guard officials, they leveraged the DESS mission needs memorandum outlining required patrol coverage for the program to determine that the kits were sufficient to support collection efforts. However, the Coast Guard could not demonstrate how it determined the DESS patrol coverage or number of required DESS kits.

<sup>11</sup> DESS kits include digital forensic tools, commercial-off-the-shelf equipment, and enterprise-level software that supports collection, analysis, and storage methods to extract and examine digital copies of information obtained from electronic devices.

<sup>12</sup> The count of 90 cutters does not include U.S. Navy or allied nation vessels available for Law Enforcement Detachment teams to deploy on.





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Although Coast Guard officials did not have support to justify the ideal number of DESS-trained personnel, they believed an allocation of 25 seats for training per year would be ideal to account for turnover and potential staff movement. However, from FYs 2021 through 2023, the Coast Guard only trained 48 people to use the DESS kits. There should have been at least 75 trained personnel between those fiscal years based on the **Coast Guard's assumption** for the number needed. Moreover, the Coast Guard continues to track program statistics using several spreadsheets from the pilot phase and has not established a formal database to track DESS data.

This occurred because the Coast Guard has not conducted an analysis of the DESS program to determine what is required to support its implementation. For example, the Coast Guard has not identified the number of DESS kits needed to ensure that all cutters deployed to the Maritime Transit Zone are equipped with a DESS kit, as required. Additionally, the Coast Guard did not identify the number of certified operators needed to fully implement the DESS program. Lastly, Coast Guard officials said they rely on feedback from interagency partners **instead of program evaluations to determine the program's capabilities**.

As a result, the Coast Guard may be missing interdiction opportunities. In fact, the Coast Guard reported that it was unable to search 112 confiscated devices during the pilot program due to the lack of DESS kits or trained operators. The inability to search these devices caused the Coast Guard to miss potential intelligence collection opportunities.

### Conclusion

Transnational criminal organizations are expected to continue smuggling cocaine through the Maritime Transit Zone at historically high levels. Without addressing the issues identified in this report, the Coast Guard may be missing opportunities to meet target goals of removing cocaine and reducing the illicit flow of drugs coming into the country.

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** We recommend the Commandant of the Coast Guard develop and implement a drug interdiction contingency plan to prioritize the availability of cutters for drug interdiction missions and to mitigate the risk of cutters being unavailable.

**Recommendation 2:** We recommend the Commandant of the Coast Guard update the Marine Information for Safety and Law Enforcement system to require commanding officer and district-level reviews to ensure data accuracy within the system.

**Recommendation 3:** We recommend the Commandant of the Coast Guard conduct a needs assessment for the Digital Evidence Search and Seizure program, including the number of kits



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and trained personnel needed to ensure the program's success in gathering intelligence while at sea.

**Recommendation 4:** We recommend the Commandant of the Coast Guard identify and implement a centralized database to capture, analyze, and report on information related to the Coast Guard's Digital Evidence Search and Seizure program's success.

#### Management Comments and OIG Analysis

The Coast Guard provided management comments on a draft of this report. We included the comments in their entirety in Appendix B. We also received technical comments from the Coast Guard on the draft report, and we revised the report as appropriate. The Coast Guard concurred with recommendations 2, 3, and 4, which we consider open and resolved. The Coast Guard did not concur with recommendation 1, which we consider open and unresolved. A summary of the Coast Guard's response and our analysis follows.

In response to our draft report, the Coast Guard identified concerns with the data delays noted in our access to information paragraph. We disagree with some of the statements Coast Guard officials made. Specifically, the Coast Guard stated that we requested "Privileged User" level access. Our initial request was for read-only access. Additionally, the Coast Guard stated that we amended our request for system access to a request for data extracts. We requested data extracts after we were unable to obtain direct system access to avoid further delays to our audit work. The Coast Guard eventually denied our request for read-only access.

**Coast Guard Response to Recommendation 1:** Non-Concur. The Coast Guard stated that a contingency plan would be redundant and ineffective at resolving asset availability issues. It also stated that a one-size-fits-all contingency plan is not feasible due to the dynamic nature of the drug interdiction mission. Coast Guard officials stated that the component uses the Global Force Management process for asset planning across its missions, including the drug interdiction mission. They stated that the process includes a strategic review, which identifies specific areas where risks exist and highlights contingency plans for those areas. Also, as part of this process, the Coast Guard selected the drug interdiction mission to highlight in FYs 2023 and 2024 and created contingency plans for asset shortages, which includes availability of partner nation assets, Law Enforcement Detachment on allied vessels, alternative means of increasing partner interdictions, and other considerations to meet the overall Coast Guard goals.

**OIG Analysis:** During our audit, we found that the Coast Guard did not have a contingency plan to address situations impacting cutter unavailability. We reviewed the Coast Guard's Global Force Management process and determined that it does not identify asset availability



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for the counterdrug mission. We requested the Coast Guard's FY 2023 and 2024 contingency plans, which identified program risks, potential impacts to the mission, and a risk response. The plan included general actions the Coast Guard takes to reduce the likelihood of the risk occurring but did not include actions the Coast Guard will take after a risk occurs to reduce the impact of asset availability. The recommendation will remain open and unresolved until the Coast Guard designs and implements a plan to reduce the impact of asset availability on the counterdrug mission.

**Coast Guard Response to Recommendation 2:** Concur. The Coast Guard is updating the MISLE database. The updates include requiring commanding officer and district-level reviews to ensure data accuracy and including these changes in updated versions of the system. Estimated Completion Date: September 30, 2025.

**OIG Analysis:** The Coast Guard's actions are responsive to the recommendation, which will remain open and resolved until the Coast Guard provides documentation showing that all planned corrective actions are completed.

**Coast Guard Response to Recommendation 3:** Concur. The Coast Guard will conduct a job task analysis of the Digital Evidence First Responder Course to analyze the training requirements to ensure they align with DESS mission collection activities. The Coast Guard is also developing a Capability Sustainment Plan in support of the DESS mission. This plan will codify the resourcing processes and training requirements and evaluate the DESS mission requirements to determine the appropriate number of training quotas to meet DESS mission needs. Estimated Completion Date: June 30, 2026.

**OIG Analysis:** The Coast Guard's actions are responsive to the recommendation, which will remain open and resolved until the Coast Guard provides documentation showing that all planned corrective actions are completed.

**Coast Guard Response to Recommendation 4:** Concur. The Coast Guard will ensure all entries to the Consolidated Counter Drug Database are updated to measure the collection of data from document and media exploitation activities and analyze each event. The Coast Guard is also working to access the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Document and Media Exploitation repository to allow more efficient management of DESS information. This will allow the Coast Guard to capture, analyze, and report on information related to the DESS program's success. Estimated Completion Date: December 31, 2025.

**OIG Analysis:** The Coast Guard's actions are responsive to the recommendation, which will remain open and resolved until the Coast Guard provides documentation showing that all planned corrective actions are completed.



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**Appendix A:**  
**Objective, Scope, and Methodology**

The Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General was established by the *Homeland Security Act of 2002* (Pub. L. No. 107–296) by amendment to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*.

We conducted this audit to determine to what extent the Coast Guard interdicts non-commercial vessels smuggling drugs into the United States. To answer this objective, we reviewed Federal laws and regulations related to the Coast Guard's ability to interdict non-commercial vessels suspected of drug smuggling. We also reviewed the Coast Guard's internal controls, policies, procedures, and guidance associated with the counterdrug mission. Further, we reviewed congressional testimony and prior audits from DHS OIG and the U.S. Government Accountability Office related to our objective.

In planning and performing our audit, we identified the internal control components and underlying internal control principles that were significant to the audit objective. Specifically, we reviewed how the Coast Guard analyzes and responds to risks and changes related to the counterdrug mission, its implementation of internal control activities, how it uses quality information to achieve the objectives, and how it communicates with external partners. We identified internal control deficiencies that could adversely affect the Coast Guard's ability to interdict non-commercial vessels suspected of drug smuggling. However, because we limited our review to these internal control components and underlying principles, it may not have disclosed all internal control deficiencies that may have existed at the time of our audit.

We conducted interviews with personnel from the Coast Guard's Maritime Law Enforcement Office and Office of Intelligence to understand their roles and responsibilities for drug interdiction efforts. We also met with officials from the Atlantic and Pacific areas to determine their responsibilities related to interdicting non-commercial vessels. Also, we met with officials at the district level, boarding team members, and Tactical Law Enforcement officials to understand how they conduct the interdiction operations. Finally, we met with officials located at the Joint Interagency Task Force – South to determine how the agencies collaborate during drug interdiction operations. We conducted site visits to Coast Guard headquarters; Coast Guard field office locations in Miami, Florida, and Portsmouth, Virginia; and the Joint Interagency Task Force – South office in Key West, Florida. We held a combination of in-person and virtual meetings and interviews to answer our audit objective.

We analyzed the Coast Guard's drug interdiction goals and how the Coast Guard's resources impacted the ability to meet those goals. Our analysis included obtaining cocaine amounts removed by the Coast Guard and recalculating performance metrics to compare to the Coast



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**Guard's goals.** We obtained data from the Coast Guard regarding the availability of its cutters and calculated the total number of days the Coast Guard cutters were not available to conduct drug interdictions. We used this data to develop an estimate for the total amount of potential drugs missed.

We used data analysis software to draw a statistically random sample of drug cases recorded in the MISLE database from FYs 2021 through 2023. Given a total population of 918 cases, the statistically valid sample size based on 95 percent confidence level, 5 percent sampling error, and 50 percent population proportion is 271.

We tested each drug casefile in our statistical sample to verify the Coast Guard conducted commanding officer and district-level reviews on the cases, recorded the interdiction results in the system, and attached supporting documentation in the system when a violation was identified. To conduct our test, we requested screenshots from the MISLE system for each case showing the reviews were completed, the results were entered, and the supporting documentation was attached. We considered a record to be inaccurate if the Coast Guard did not upload the required supporting documentation or had not entered the results into the system.

Finally, we evaluated the Coast Guard's DESS program to determine how the component determined the resources needed when transitioning DESS from a pilot program to a mission requirement. We reviewed the DESS mission needs memorandum to determine what resources it identified as requirements when transitioning the program. We analyzed information pertaining to the total number of DESS kits available to the Coast Guard and the total number of individuals trained for the program. We also attempted to evaluate the database used as part of the program, but the Coast Guard did not have a database to store DESS-derived data at the time of our audit.

To assess the reliability of the Coast Guard's counterdrug data, we identified MISLE as the primary storage database for all law enforcement-related information. We identified relevant system controls through reviews of policies and procedures and interviews with officials from the Coast Guard. Before testing the counterdrug cases, we analyzed the drug case data provided from MISLE. We compared the counterdrug cases from MISLE to the data in the Department of Defense Consolidated Counterdrug Database to verify that the system contained complete drug case information. Following our data reliability assessment of MISLE, we determined the data was sufficiently reliable to support the findings, recommendations, and conclusions in the report.

We conducted this audit from July 2023 through October 2024 pursuant to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, 5 U.S.C. §§ 401–424, and according to generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain



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sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

**DHS OIG's Access to DHS Information**

DHS OIG experienced significant delays obtaining the data required to complete this audit. The Coast Guard faced challenges providing system access and denied our initial requests for direct, read-only access to the Asset Logistics Management Information System and MISLE databases after an 111-day delay. To complete the audit, we had to request data extracts in lieu of system access. The Coast Guard worked with DHS OIG to provide the requested data extracts after denying system access. However, the Coast Guard did not make complete, usable data for this audit available to DHS OIG until 205 days after our initial request for system access.



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**Appendix B:**  
**Coast Guard Comments on the Draft Report**

U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security  
United States  
Coast Guard



Commandant  
United States Coast Guard

2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE  
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Staff Symbol: CG-8D  
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7500  
23 Jan 2025

**MEMORANDUM**

From: *Craig A. Bennett*  
COMDT (CG-8D)

Reply to: Audit Liaison  
Attn of: CDR M. W. Zinn  
(202) 372-3535

To: Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D.  
Inspector General

Subj: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO DRAFT REPORT; THE COAST GUARD FACES  
CHALLENGES INTERDICTING NON-COMMERCIAL VESSELS SMUGGLING  
DRUGS INTO THE UNITED STATES

Ref: (a) OIG Project No. 23-036-AUD-USCG

1. Per reference (a), thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. The U.S. Coast Guard appreciates the Office of the Inspector General's (OIG) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.
2. Coast Guard leadership is pleased to note OIG's recognition that, from fiscal years (FY) 2021 through 2023, the Coast Guard interdicted an estimated 421.9 metric tons of cocaine. The Coast Guard remains committed to strengthening its tactics, techniques, and procedures to stop the illicit flow of drugs entering the United States by disrupting the flow of cocaine and other illegal drugs in the maritime environment.
3. Contrary to the assertion in OIG's draft report, however, the Coast Guard did not deny or delay OIG's access to information needed to complete this audit. Although it is correct that OIG requested access to the Marine Information for Safety and Law Enforcement (MISLE) database on October 18, 2023, and requested access to the Asset Logistics Management Information System (ALMIS) and Electronic Asset Logbook (EAL) systems on November 1, 2023, it is important readers of this report understand that the OIG's request was not simply for "direct, read-only access." In fact, the OIG requested "Privileged User"-level access, which carries the risk of inflicting damage or harm to the system-of-record data contained within the system, and of disabling the system for all users. Per COMDTINST 5500.13 (series), "Cybersecurity Governance," a Privileged User is a trusted user that is authorized to perform security-relevant functions that ordinary users are not authorized to perform (e.g., system administrator, database administrator). Specifically, the MISLE, ALMIS, and EAL systems require users to meet a high level of certification and close scrutiny for trusted privileged access to be granted. Accordingly, a Privileged User is expected to have years of technical education and practical experience understanding Coast Guard missions and underlying context to have trusted and privileged access.



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4. Coast Guard uses and operates information systems and networks connected to or operating under the Department of Defense (DoD) Information Network (DoDIN) to promote readiness with the armed forces and national security and national defense missions. Accordingly, Privileged Users to Coast Guard systems must also adhere to DoD cybersecurity requirements, standards, and policies that directly affect the DoDIN and DoD mission assurance, while also adhering to U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS, or the Department) oversight and compliance requirements.

5. To mitigate inadvertent data spills, damage, or harm, Coast Guard coordinated OIG's request with others having equities in the request and worked with the OIG to reach a reasonable accommodation and ensure the OIG received the information needed to perform its work without jeopardizing confidentiality or security. For example, the OIG amended its request for system access to a request for data extracts from the MISLE and ALMIS/EAL systems on January 17, 2024, and the Coast Guard provided the MISLE extracts on February 28, 2024, and the ALMIS/EAL extracts on March 7, 2024. Further, on January 23, 2024, the Coast Guard requested clarification of the parameters of the OIG's request, after which Coast Guard provided responses in accordance with an agreed-upon timeline between the Coast Guard and the OIG, which was completed by March 7, 2024.

6. In addition, it is important to note that extracting requested data was a significant challenge. Personnel from Coast Guard and the OIG participated in a walkthrough meeting held on February 13, 2024, to review what was needed for the audit and what data may be available. To address the OIG's requests, novel database queries had to be built as the database is not designed for ad-hoc reporting, and the data was not set up to answer OIG's requests. Limited Coast Guard staffing was also pulled from mission-essential operations to produce this ad-hoc request.

7. Ultimately, the Coast Guard's actions to provide the OIG with data extracted from these systems mitigated risks to the protection of sensitive information including but not limited to critical infrastructure and defense information unrelated to this audit, as well as prevented potential cyber security violations, and helped avoid delays in OIG's audit completion. Taking an appropriate amount of time to understand OIG Information Technology system and data access requests and reach an accommodation on when needed should not be viewed as a "delay" or "denial," but rather due diligence to protect the sensitive information.

8. The draft report contained four recommendations, one with which the Coast Guard non-concurs (Recommendation 1) and three with which the Coast Guard concurs (Recommendations 2-4). Attached find our detailed response to each recommendation. The Coast Guard previously submitted technical comments addressing several accuracy, contextual, and other issues under a separate cover for OIG's consideration, as appropriate.

9. Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. If you have any questions, my point of contact is CDR Matthew Zinn who can be reached at (202) 372-3535 or [Matthew.W.Zinn@uscg.mil](mailto:Matthew.W.Zinn@uscg.mil). We look forward to working with you again in the future.

#

Enclosure: (1) U.S. Coast Guard Response to OIG Draft Report Recommendations

2





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Subj: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO DRAFT REPORT: THE COAST GUARD FACES CHALLENGES INTERDICTING NON-COMMERCIAL VESSELS SMUGGLING DRUGS INTO THE UNITED STATES 7500 23 Jan 2025

**Management Response to Recommendations**  
**Contained in OIG 23-036-AUD-USCG**

OIG recommended that the Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard:

**Recommendation 1:** Develop and implement a drug interdiction contingency plan to prioritize the availability of cutters for drug interdiction missions and to mitigate the risk of cutters being unavailable.

**Response:** Non-concur. Development of a contingency plan for drug interdiction assets would be redundant and not effective to resolve the documented issue of asset availability. Specifically, the Coast Guard currently has a robust Global Force Management (GFM) process<sup>1</sup> that enables deliberate planning for employment of the Service's multi-mission assets across the Service's 11 statutory missions, as well as processes for both routine and emergent reallocation of assets when contingencies or higher priority mission demands arise. This process already addresses the drug interdiction mission in the same manner as the Service's other 10 missions, such as Search and Rescue or Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.

Further, the Coast Guard currently participates in the Department of Defense's (DoD's) GFM<sup>2</sup> process to accomplish the same functions via DoD requests for Coast Guard assets, including detection and monitoring support to the U.S. government's maritime drug interdiction mission. Those processes account for situations in which Coast Guard cutters may be unavailable for counterdrug operations. Accordingly, force allocation changes are made through a risk management process with mitigation strategies considered. Specifically, during the annual Strategic Review, the Coast Guard identifies specific areas in which risk exists and highlights contingency plans for consideration. The Coast Guard Deputy Commandant for Operations selected the drug interdiction mission to highlight in FY 2023 and FY 2024, and created contingency plans for asset shortages in this mission space. These contingency plans consider real time availability of partner nation assets, Law Enforcement Detachment space available on allied vessels, alternative means of increasing partner interdictions, and other considerations to effectively meet overall Coast Guard goals. These contingencies are also reviewed and modified as needed by appropriate leadership depending on the asset under consideration throughout the year to ensure maximum flexibility.

Development of a one-size-fits-all contingency as recommended by the OIG is not feasible due to the dynamic nature of the drug interdiction mission. Although the Coast Guard faces challenges with the availability of interdiction assets, focusing resources narrowly to achieve all drug removal goals will negatively impact support to other, higher priority, missions.

The Coast Guard requests that OIG consider this recommendation resolved and closed.

<sup>1</sup> Defined by COMDTINST 3120.4C, "Coast Guard Global Force Management (CG GFM)," dated July 2024; [https://media.defense.gov/2024/Sep/17/2003545303/-1/-1/0/CL\\_3120\\_4C.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2024/Sep/17/2003545303/-1/-1/0/CL_3120_4C.PDF), and other associated documents.

<sup>2</sup> CJCSM 3130.06D, "Global Force Management Allocation Policies and Procedures," dated June 20, 2024; <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/56/Documents/Library/Manuals/CJCSM%203130.06D.pdf>.

Encl: (1)



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**Recommendation 2:** Update the Marine Information for Safety and Law Enforcement (MISLE) system to require commanding officer and district-level reviews to ensure data accuracy within the system.

**Response:** Concur. The Coast Guard Office of Law Enforcement Policy (CG-MLE) is in the process of updating the entirety of the MISLE database, including required data entries and procedures. Currently, CG-MLE is working with various Coast Guard Offices, as appropriate, to implement needed changes within MISLE—to include requiring commanding officer and district-level reviews to ensure data accuracy—and to ensure these changes are included in updated versions of the system. An initial task was created on December 16, 2024, to have MISLE updated in accordance with this recommendation.

Estimated Completion Date (ECD): September 30, 2025.

**Recommendation 3:** Conduct a needs assessment for the Digital Evidence Search and Seizure program, including the number of kits and trained personnel needed to ensure the program's success in gathering intelligence while at sea.

**Response:** Concur. On July 18, 2023, the Coast Guard Office of Specialized Capabilities Document and Media Exploitation (CG-7213 DOMEX) leveraged an internal Digital Evidence Search and Seizure (DESS) Mission Needs Memo<sup>3</sup> outlining patrol coverage requirements to determine that 10 kits met the capability resource needs to support DESS collections. The Coast Guard currently exceeds the requirement regarding cutters per day allocated to Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S).

By the end of September 2025, CG-7213 DOMEX will purchase three additional DESS kits to address potential increased mission demands. The additional kits will increase the total available DESS kit for deployment to 13, and further exceed the JIATF-S patrol coverage requirement regarding cutters per day allocated to JIATF-S. Beginning in June 2025 and completed by the end of June 2026, the Coast Guard Force Readiness Command, in coordination with CG-7213 DOMEX, will also conduct a job task analysis of 100558, the "Digital Evidence First Responder Course," to analyze training requirements in alignment with DESS mission collection activities.

Further, by the end of June 2025, the CG-7213 DOMEX Program Office will develop a Capability Sustainment Plan in support of the DESS mission. Once complete, this plan will codify capability resourcing processes and training requirements and evaluate personnel attrition/retention metrics and DESS mission requirements to determine the appropriate number of training quotas required to meet DESS mission needs.

Overall ECD: June 30, 2026.

<sup>3</sup> "Digital Evidence Search and Seizure (DESS) Maritime Law Enforcement/Intelligence Mission Needs," dated July 2023.



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**Recommendation 4:** Identify and implement a centralized database to capture, analyze, and report on information related to the Coast Guard's Digital Evidence Search and Seizure program's success.

**Response:** Concur. The Coast Guard is currently using the U.S. Intelligence Community's Consolidated Counterdrug Database (CCDB) for measuring drug flow and interdiction performance. The Coast Guard Intelligence Coordination Center (ICC), Pacific Area Maritime Intelligence Fusion Center (MIFC) and Atlantic Area MIFC will collaborate as appropriate to ensure all CCDB entries are updated to measure DOMEX collection and analysis for each event. In addition, the Coast Guard will identify the best method of presenting more comprehensive interdiction information collection and analysis performance metrics to stakeholders.

Specifically, CG-MLE will continue to work with other Coast Guard offices to compile, analyze, and report on UNCLASSIFIED DOMEX metrics, and may incorporate this data into the Coast Guard's annual interdiction report which will be complete by the end of December 2025. ICC is also working to potentially access U.S. Customs and Border Protection's DOMEX repository which may provide a solution that allows more efficient management of DESS information. By using this approach, the Coast Guard anticipates expanding on available databases and resources to access to integrated information to capture, analyze, and report on information related to the Coast Guard's Digital Evidence Search and Seizure program's success.

ECD: December 31, 2025.



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**Appendix C:**  
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U.S. Mail:  
 Department of Homeland Security  
 Office of Inspector General, Mail Stop 0305  
 Attention: Hotline  
 245 Murray Drive SW  
 Washington, DC 20528-0305

The CHAIRMAN. And with that, I recognize Senator Cantwell.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for mentioning the TRANQ Act. I, too, supported that important legislation, which is one of the tools, and I just want to say, Ms. Ehlinger, again, you know, we have had I think 11 regional meetings in my state and it is just—the story is the same. The story is the same and the call is the same. We need more to alert.

I will never forget a high school student in Yakima, Washington telling me that, you know, having an assembly once a year is not enough. You should be telling high schoolers every day do not take

anything given to you by anyone other than a health care provider. Just do not.

And I think that we have to amplify on many different fronts. We have to fight this scourge on many different fronts. So, again, thank you for your willingness to continue to push on this.

And, you know, the jurisdiction of this committee is a little more on the transportation network and but your illumination of the problem just shows you what distribution does to destroy families.

I want to ask Chief Hall about those distribution networks because we hear a lot about the border and we want more security and detection at the border but it is clear that these rings are so elaborate that by attacking the transportation network we can discover and illuminate and catch these rings.

And what have we learned about these networks and transportation system and why is interdiction like you have experienced in Spokane or Tucson—why do we need to expand the tools given to law enforcement to help with this?

Mr. HALL. Thank you, Ranking Member Cantwell, for the question.

There are a number of different reasons on why we need to do this, but primarily when I talk to my DEA-DHS partners it is that we are catching a fraction of the illegal narcotics that are entering the country.

Such a small amount it looks huge on the newspaper on the front page when we—you know, when we post shots of it for the media but that is just a fraction of what is actually entering the country and we are missing so much more and we know we are missing so much more.

The investigations, particularly the collaborative investigations with our Federal partners are where we are the most functional and we see the most success.

Bringing local, state, tribal, and Federal partners together just enhances or scales up all of the skill sets and brings in the—quite frankly, the resources of the Federal Government that most of us do not have. Collaborating allows us to locate more, to utilize the intelligence base from the Federal Government on international—national transportation routes and through, like we said, rail, sea, air, and the interstates, which is where we are seeing most of this.

The investment by the cartels—and make no mistake, this is all cartel driven—is such that they will completely disassemble a vehicle—a brand new vehicle—put as much narcotics into every single void inside that vehicle, and then assemble it again.

They will go through that amount of energy, put the vehicle back together, and put it on the road, and it is off on the freeways. The 1.7 million pills that I referenced in my opening statement that was in two vehicles—two sedans—two nondescript sedans that were that had to be completely disassembled in order to recover all of those narcotics.

Senator CANTWELL. And how did you discover to check those?

Mr. HALL. Investigations.

Senator CANTWELL. Something told you?

Mr. HALL. Yes, ma'am.

Senator CANTWELL. Yes. This is why I want us to have a more collaborative effort here because when you look at the technology

that we have at the border that is doing some of this detection but like you said they are tearing cars apart.

So what do you think a new vapor technology could help us do?

Mr. HALL. Any tool will help us down this road whether it is X-ray technology, vapor technology, even going to like I call old school canine technology. They are all very effective in different ways and having a layered approach and a cross-sector approach, multifaceted, this is a very complex problem.

It requires complex solutions, and having all of those technologies and all of those different approaches is just going to enhance law enforcement's ability to detect and seize these narcotics.

Senator CANTWELL. Well, I am just going to be a little more clear about—the challenges of getting a warrant on search and seizure are complex but when you are at one of our ports or transportation systems and you have a nondetected—you can basically—a noninvasive way to detect the movement of fentanyl.

That is what I want at every transportation hub and because that will stop this flow. I mean, it is not going to stop all but it will give us the tools that you are talking about.

And then how can we best help too on the labs and the information? What is the gap there that we are seeing?

Mr. HALL. I am sorry. The labs?

Senator CANTWELL. Locally how you have to do the work to try to detect and figure out what you have acquired.

Mr. HALL. A lot of it is just the sheer number, the backlog. So, say, we are working with the state lab in order to process the narcotics that we seize and we have to wait for that processing in order to charge for the most part.

So it is that kind of resource that is limited and I know from my time in Arizona it was the same issue there. It is just there is—it is a capacity issue. There is so much illegal narcotics coming into the country and so few people doing this work including lab personnel, law enforcement, even harm reduction agencies that we work with.

You know, going to an earlier point is we inform them everything that you see out on the street from marijuana to what you think is cocaine to what you think is a prescribed pill is going to have fentanyl in it.

What we are finding out is everything we test has fentanyl in it. So we just tell everybody know what you are taking. It is fentanyl.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

#### **STATEMENT OF HON. TED BUDD, U.S. SENATOR FROM NORTH CAROLINA**

Senator BUDD [presiding]. Thank you, Senator Cantwell.

You know, there is, roughly, a thousand miles between my home in North Carolina and the southern border but on average nine North Carolinians lose their lives every day due to fentanyl.

I just want to thank you personally both for being here. When I talk to law enforcement officers in all 100 counties in North Carolina I repeatedly hear that every single county in North Carolina is a border county, largely, because of the prior administration's policies. But I think that we are on track to do much better.

The county next to where I live, the sheriff there he said, we just had a traffic stop—it looked like some of the pictures that were shown earlier—and there was enough in that trunk to kill 250,000 people. Unbelievable.

Chief, while you are here, is there anything else Congress can do to give local law enforcement the additional tools to go after drug and human traffickers?

Mr. HALL. Resources are always scarce. Always scarce. You know, I know currently the Department of Justice is holding up grants.

I know that they will come out sooner or later, but those types of grant funding helps us at the local level, helps us at the state level, and it helps our collaborations with HIDTA and different task forces that we have created with the DEA, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Homeland Security investigations.

All those different agencies we are all facing the same scarcity of resources.

Senator BUDD. Thank you.

Ms. Ehlinger, thank you for sharing your story of Jake as well. I would imagine that our children are about the same age, and we do not sit up here, whether it is in this body or across the hall or in the House of Representatives, as theorists.

We are all personally affected by this. So it means a lot. I remember when I first ran in 2016 and right before the election I was given the devastating news that the young volunteer staffer that was driving me that day had just lost his younger brother about the same age as Jake and it was from something he thought was something innocent but it was not.

And that brother that survived and was volunteering for me that day gave a speech 2 weeks ago regarding fentanyl except it was not at—on that side of the dais. It was on this side because he is now a Member of Congress in the U.S. House of Representatives and he is in the fight in the other chamber.

So, again, we are not theorists. We are all personally affected by this and, again, I thank you both for what you do.

Ms. EHLINGER. Thank you.

Senator BUDD. Senator Baldwin.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TAMMY BALDWIN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM WISCONSIN**

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you.

Ms. Ehlinger, thank you so much for being here to bravely share your story about your family and your son, and I thank you for your tireless work to bring attention to this tragedy.

I believe to my core that your efforts are saving lives and I am heartbroken for your family's tremendous loss.

I have heard from and sat with mothers in Wisconsin who have shared with me stories just like yours. Fentanyl is devastating families and communities in my state and, we know, throughout our country and I am committed to fighting this deadly epidemic on all fronts.

And I know my colleagues, as you have already heard, are hearing similar demands from their constituents. Congress has taken a



few important bipartisan steps in the right direction but clearly there is so much more work for us to do.

So, Ms. Ehlinger, it is thanks to the brave advocacy of people like you that this important issue remains really forefront in our work and I thank you for that.

Chief Hall, I want to thank you for your work, both in Tucson and now Spokane, in the front lines to protect Americans and we have to make sure that we are putting every resource possible toward protecting Americans and stopping the movement of deadly fentanyl and illicit substances across our borders but also throughout our communities.

For that reason I worked with Senator Cantwell to introduce a bill that would stop smuggling of drugs through our domestic transportation networks. We have already heard that bill elevated during this hearing, and I am eager to collaborate with both Senator Cantwell and Senator Cruz again this Congress to continue that work.

I would love to hear your recommendations, Chief Hall, about actions the Federal Government can take to improve the coordination between local law enforcement and other levels of law enforcement but also additional resources that would help you and your colleagues detect and seize the illegal drugs right on our own streets.

Like my colleagues I have held many first responder roundtables throughout the state of Wisconsin, and sometimes there are challenges in the various levels that are looking at these distribution networks—these domestic cartels, if you will—and tracking high-level cases versus the work you are doing to find the individual perpetrator in a particular case.

Can you please share a little bit more about that?

Mr. HALL. Sure. Thank you, Senator Baldwin. I appreciate the question, and I will try not to get myself in trouble here.

Senator BALDWIN. It is a tough—

Mr. HALL. There is—there are so many different things the Federal Government can do and have done in the past, quite frankly. We have always had a good partnership with our Federal law enforcement partners.

But I think sometimes—I would submit one of the first things we could do is draw back a little and look at a wider perspective of what we are dealing with here and define it is transportation networks and disrupting those networks in any way, shape, or form will disrupt the marketplace—the business model that these cartels operate under—and in that same fashion I think we can spend a little bit more time providing the training and resources for state and local and, quite frankly, even Federal law enforcement to look at how they are funneling money.

This is a for-profit business in this model and it is not giant loads of cash anymore. It is Bitcoin and it is electronic wallets, and local and state and a lot of Federal agencies do not have the sophistication to track that money and seize that money and, quite frankly, in a lot of cases it is completely untrackable.

But those—while we are just now starting to dip our toe in how to go after those funds—those illegal funds gained through, quite frankly, the killing of our children—that would be enormously

helpful if we took a look at that as well as the transportation networks.

And as I said before this is a very complex problem. It is going to need a very complex solution that crosses sectors, is multi-dimensional, and that is one of the ways I can think of.

We just had this discussion back where I am from is how do we go after those wallets and those Bitcoins that are being utilized to hide these illegal funds from the government.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you, Chief.

Senator BUDD. Senator Moreno.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BERNIE MORENO,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM OHIO**

Senator MORENO. So, first of all, Ms. Ehlinger, thank you for being here. My youngest son is 26 which would be about, I would guess, Jake's age today. I cannot imagine, honestly, how you have been able to do that. So God bless you. God bless you for your strength.

Because, quite frankly, there is probably a part of you that is just really pissed off, and so pushing that and suppressing that down has got to be really hard.

And I am really pissed off too because I have seen the Federal Government do so little to attack this. I mean, you said something in your testimony that really stuck with me which is we are at war and we are losing that war. Would you agree? Do you feel that way?

Ms. EHLINGER. One hundred percent and I am so thankful for this administration and for being here today because it is—as you said, it is so painful just to live with not having Jake every day and then to just know that our amazing country is just—it felt like to me was doing absolutely nothing, and more and more and more and more children were dying every single day and it just does not make sense.

Senator MORENO. Yes. In Ohio we probably lose about 4,000 people a month to fentanyl poisoning, and you look back and you go, OK, like, if we are losing 4,000 American kids every year just in Ohio—110,000 around the country—you would think that would be, like, a 12-alarm fire in Washington, D.C., over the last 4 years. Yet, what did we do?

Ms. EHLINGER. Exactly.

Senator MORENO. We did not do anything at the border, like, nothing. In fact, sat here on their hands while they knew this was going on.

And so I get the sentiment today from the other side but, honestly, you know, to me it falls so short. Number one, what did President Trump do? Declared the Mexican cartels a foreign terrorist organizations.

We should wipe those animals off the face of the Earth and, yet, the administration in the last 4 years did nothing about that.

We should make anybody who distributes fentanyl an accessory to first degree murder and if you are the ultimate supplier of that then you are a first degree murder Federal charge recipient.

Anybody who is involved in the banking of that, the transportation of that, if you are a tech company and you are allowing the

sale of these products then you, the executives of these companies, are an accessory to first degree murder.

We have to—we cannot have half measures. If it was my son I would not be able to sit through this, honestly. How you do it—like I said, I will repeat it again, God bless you for doing what you are doing.

And to my Democrat colleagues, I hope this is not just words about more government spending but, rather, actual attacks on what we are seeing at our southern border that we treat this as an existential threat to our country.

You know, you said, Chief—I will turn to you—you said this is a for-profit business. This is not just a for-profit business. This is a multi-billion dollar a year operation that this country is enabling—this country and this administration and the majority that had control of Congress over the last 4 years they made these drug cartel members so insanely wealthy. Those are the billionaires that they should be talking about when they rant on the Senate floor that they are going after.

And, Chief, you said something—and God bless you too for the work that you do and all law enforcement does but I would just push back a little bit on something you said.

You said that most fentanyl comes across legal ports of entry. We do not know that. We have absolutely no idea how much fentanyl comes across through nondesignated ports of entry because by definition we have no idea, and when I have been on the border you look at what the Border Patrol agents are doing where you have this surge of human trafficking on one side, these fake asylum claims that my colleagues will not even vote on a bill to say, hey, you cannot claim asylum through a nondesignated port of entry, they will not even agree to that and say, hey, if you are going to claim asylum you got to do it at a legal port of entry and you got to wait. No, they want to parole these people into the country, which is insane.

So the Border Patrol agents have to go to those nondesignated ports of entry. I was in Del Rio when the Haitian surge happened. There were ports of entries that were wide open.

These were streets that were available. So we have no idea what comes across there, and we have to go right at the root cause and make the punishment so severe.

So I am all for investing more money in the Coast Guard. We have a big lake in Ohio. But I hope that what comes out of this testimony from both of you and, hopefully, there is colleagues on the other side of the aisle that have kids that are your kids' age and realize what is really going on and that we take this moment to say we are not going to allow a 9/11 plane to crash every single day in America and do something about it. Pass legislation to make this happen.

So I urge my colleagues on the other side of the aisle you abdicated your duties for the last 4 years. Step up and work with us to pass meaningful legislation to attack the billionaires that you enabled on the other side of our border to kill our kids.

Thank you. Thank you.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Senator Moreno.

Senator Sullivan, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DAN SULLIVAN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA**

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate the witnesses very much.

Ms. Ehlinger, I want to extend my condolences, too. I just read your testimony. Sounds like Jake was an incredible, amazing, gifted young man. I am very sorry, really sorry for your loss.

Ms. EHLINGER. Thank you.

Senator SULLIVAN. Is that his UT uniform on right there?

Ms. EHLINGER. Yes, sir.

Senator SULLIVAN. My mom went to UT so—

Ms. EHLINGER. Awesome.

Senator SULLIVAN.—I have been a Longhorns fan for a long time.

Let me ask a question. We have a—maybe you have met her. If you have not it would be really great because you are very similar to her. We have a very courageous woman in Alaska named Sandy Snodgrass. She has kind of had the same experience that you have.

Her son Bruce was killed by a fentanyl overdose like Jake. It was laced with something. So she has done what you have done, which has kind of taken this horrible grief that most people cannot even imagine and used it in a way to push for public policy changes in state law. She has done that in Alaska.

And then she and I and our Governor we have teamed up on this big campaign we launched about eight or 9 months ago in Alaska called One Pill Can Kill, and I do not know if you are familiar with that but what we are trying to do on that is to get to prevention, to let the young people in Alaska know that, hey, if you are taking a pill or smoking a joint you might have no idea that this is laced with fentanyl.

Believe it or not, my state in the last few years has had the highest overdose rates of fentanyl of any state in the country—Alaska, 4,000 miles from the border.

So when people say, what do you guys care up in Alaska—you are far away from the southern border, we care because it is killing our kids just like it is killing kids in Texas.

So are you familiar with the One Pill Can Kill campaign and have you guys done it in Texas? And I would really like to get your sense of prevention.

We are trying to put—we put this big campaign together, gotten all the high school kids and even junior high kids involved to do PSA announcements so they can learn from each other. I think it is most effective when it comes from peer to peer, not senators and Governors telling them.

So what is your sense on that, and I would really—again, I really appreciate your courage for being here. I know probably every single day you are missing your really wonderful son.

Ms. EHLINGER. Yes. Thank you so much.

Actually, Governor Abbott and the state of Texas had a One Pill Kills campaign.

Senator SULLIVAN. Oh, good.

Ms. EHLINGER. And if you drive in the state of Texas on any highway you will see signs that say one pill kills, and many people have also put up billboards with their children's pictures on them saying fentanyl kills.

I think all of those things help. I 100 percent agree with you that coming from the younger generation is more impactful.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes. You know, part of the frustration for me has been is anybody thinking about the fact that this is our future. These young people that are dying, that are getting wiped out in large numbers, that is the future of our country.

So what is going to happen in 10 years when we have this horrific gap because we have lost so many of them? My son is in the NFL and they do the Cause for Cleats.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes.

Ms. EHLINGER. Cleats for a Cause—I am sorry—and he—and then one of his friends also who he played with at UT wore their One Pill Kills fentanyl awareness cleats and got a great response from that. I think, like Senator Cantwell said earlier, we have to come at this from every angle.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes.

Ms. EHLINGER. It cannot be, you know, here, let us just go here and let us look at this. It is a—like we were saying, it is a war and we are losing. We are losing bad.

Senator SULLIVAN. Well, if you have ideas in—from what you learned in Texas on the One Pill Can Kill campaign, prevention, right? So young people are aware.

A lot of young people are not aware at all that this is a—you know, taking a pill like that that is not a prescribed pill that they got from a pharmacist can be a Russian roulette death sentence.

Ms. EHLINGER. Exactly what I call it is Russian roulette. I mean, it is in cocaine. It is in pot. It is in all of the things that in our generation people could experiment with and they had no fear of dying. They just were making a really stupid mistake—

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes.

Ms. EHLINGER.—and a bad choice.

Senator SULLIVAN. Well, look, we might look at kind of nationalizing some of these ideas of prevention.

Real quick—so thank you again—Chief, I just had a quick question too for you. You know, you served up in kind of the Pacific Northwest area and then down along the border.

Any major differences? And then this is probably for the next panel but what always really frustrates me on this is that Xi Jinping is a dictator, right?

I mean, nobody does anything in China without his permission, and the flow that continues from China, you know, he did a deal with President Trump. He did a deal with President Biden to stop this flow and, you know, it is more what we call promise fatigue with the Chinese. They make big announcements and they never keep their promises even to our leaders.

So what is your sense on kind of differences at the Pacific Northwest level that you have seen—that is Alaska, of course—and then any sense on the Chinese just ignoring it and wanting to kill young Americans?

Mr. HALL. I will take the difference between Arizona and Washington first. The biggest difference I see is we would interdict massive loads in Tucson, Arizona.

Tucson is 60 miles north of the international port of entry, and it was nonstop and it was not unusual to get hundreds of thousands of pills or bulk powder form in the pounds in Arizona.

That is much less likely up in Washington. It does happen, as we have seen and as I have testified. It does happen but not nearly as often and that is because, you know, when it comes from the border then it gets distributed throughout the Nation. So we are getting smaller amounts up there.

But the smaller amounts are just as deadly and we have just as many fatal overdoses and we have just as many social problems that come from fentanyl as every other city.

So when I look at downtown Tucson and I look at downtown Spokane, if I did not know where I was at they would look very similar and that is the impact that fentanyl has.

Senator SULLIVAN. OK. Maybe for the record—I know I am out of time—if you could answer the China question. I know it is a tough question but, you know, I just think they are flooding the zone on purpose.

Mr. HALL. Respectfully, Senator, I am going to stay out of the geopolitics. I know the precursor chemicals for the most part are coming from China and how we stop those I am not sure because they are not coming to the United States. They are going to Mexico, so that would be the realm of you fine folks.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Chief. Yes, thank you.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BUDD. Senator Sheehy, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TIM SHEEHY,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM MONTANA**

Senator SHEEHY. Thank you for coming today. Jena, thank you for taking on this cause. I know you have survived a terrible tragedy in your family so thank you for turning that into productive advocacy because it is going to take, you know, a whole country to come together to fix this.

Chief, a question for you on Montana so not too far from you. I spend a lot of time up in your neck of the woods fighting wildfires so familiar with Spokane and the surrounding area.

You know, what is your feeling on the northern border as far as impacting your communities with regard to fentanyl and drug trafficking?

Mr. HALL. As far as the northern border what we are seeing is very little coming south from Canada. Almost everything we have seen that we have been able to track, once again, with our Federal partners it is all coming up from Mexico along the interstates—like I said, I-19 to I-5, our I-10 to I-5 and then I-90 into Spokane and northern Idaho. We are the urban hub of eastern Washington and it all spreads out from there.

Senator SHEEHY. Yes, we see the same in Montana, coming up I-15 to Butte and then over. So and, you know, what interface are you seeing at all with the tribal communities in the region as far as how they are being impacted by the fentanyl crisis?

Mr. HALL. In the tribal communities it is a little bit more of an invisible epidemic because, quite frankly, the tribes for historical

reasons are far more isolated and have far less trust in the government, and so it is harder to get inroads into the tribes.

And I am speaking from my personal experience as a tribal member, not—I do not enforce the law on the tribes. I have no jurisdiction. But it is probably far more tragic because it is far more isolated and it is not as well known on the tribes just because of that.

Senator SHEEHY. And what do you feel the way ahead is there? Obviously, we feel those same issues in Montana. You know, we have reservation land and travel communities all across the state and they are dealing, you know, with this crisis first and—I mean, the first thing I hear from our tribal leaders is the fentanyl crisis is tearing apart their communities and, you know, they fall into, as you well know, a very unique law enforcement construct with their sovereignty. But they still want their streets cleaned up. They still want their kids to be healthy.

So given your experience in the region what do you think are some ways ahead where we can start to thread that needle, where we can still respect the sovereignty of our tribal communities but help them battle this epidemic and win?

Mr. HALL. I think much stronger and closer relationships with tribal authorities local and state and Federal authorities. I think we are getting there, at least in my region and the Spokane region with the Spokane tribe Kalispell, Colville, all of those tribes.

We are getting to a point where our relationships are getting stronger, where we understand this is a common issue that is killing all of us.

It does not matter if you are Native or indigenous, if you are from Spokane or if you are from Omak. It is still going to kill you, and so we all need to come together and I am starting to see that collaboration and that cooperation amongst the tribal folks—state, local and Federal as well.

Senator SHEEHY. Great. Thank you for making the trip out. I yield back.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Senator Sheehy.

Senator Markey.

**STATEMENT OF HON. EDWARD MARKEY,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS**

Senator MARKEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to begin just by expressing my deepest condolences to Ms. Ehlinger for your great loss—tragic loss. I am just so sorry.

And we want to do everything we can in order to in the future do a better job. Because you are right, we are in a war against fentanyl and that means we need every resource possible.

We need to be tracking every overdose death. We need everyone to have access to naloxone to reverse overdoses. We need enough providers and access to medications like methadone and Suboxone for people struggling with addiction.

We need communities and law enforcement to have funding to prevent fentanyl from coming into their communities and respond once it is there.

President Trump and I had lunch in September 2017 as he was on a—heading for a trip to China. I was the Ranking Member on that Committee on Foreign Relations, and I talked to him about

how important it was to tell President Xi to just stop those precursor chemicals from coming from China because we were losing 80,000 to 100,000 people a year.

And I also recommended to him that we work together on a bill to have detection devices along the southern border and that there were actually devices in place that could detect that fentanyl from coming across the border.

And in February 2018 I stood with him and he gave me the pen as he signed the bill to provide those tens of millions of dollars for the devices along the border to detect fentanyl.

So I know it is just such a very important issue that we have to deal with.

So, Chief Hall, does your police department have to balance both stopping fentanyl smuggling and responding to the overdoses from fentanyl? How do you handle that?

Mr. HALL. It is a balance, Senator, and thank you for the question. Once again, it is how we prioritize the workload and, as you know, we are understaffed. Washington State is severely understaffed.

I think it is number 50 out of the 50 states on a ratio of officers to population. So we struggle with that in allocating the appropriate amount of resources to addressing this issue.

However, it is an issue of life or death so we take that on seriously. We take that on—

Senator MARKEY. So how important is it for you, Chief, for Spokane to continue to receive sustained and reliable funding for all of the work that you are doing to take on the fentanyl crisis?

Mr. HALL. It is incredibly important. It is incredibly important. Funding is what we live on. It is how we pay my officers. That is how we pay for the technology that we use.

It is how we pay for the programs that we use, some of which that you just mentioned including naloxone, the administration of buprenorphine, and our work in the harm reduction area trying to keep people alive.

Senator MARKEY. And I am just so concerned this Trump administration is too busy making drastic, unfocused cuts and engaging in political stunts rather than actually focusing its energy in addressing the fentanyl crisis because the reality is that cuts to Federal research will slow down finding better ways to test for fentanyl, to improve upon that.

And as you know a border wall is not going to stop all of it no matter what. You are still going to need these additional resources that you have in the community because it is going to come through legal ports of entry still to some degree, no matter what happens, and disrupting funding to organizations dedicated to responding to the overdose crisis will just slow down the lifesaving efforts that you engage in every single day.

When we are talking about overdose and fentanyl epidemic playing politics is just not going to solve the problem. You need the resources to do it so and that is why I worked with President Trump to have INTERDICTION Act be signed. That was a pragmatic, bipartisan—I did it with Senator Rubio in order to put that in place.

But we need more equipment. We need more high-tech equipment even at the local level. We just need more resources in your



hands, which is why I introduced the Stop Fentanyl Overdoses Act to enhance information sharing between health care providers and law enforcement and to educate communities.

So I thank you, Chief. I thank you, Ms. Ehlinger. You have come here with serious efforts that you are recommending to us and you deserve a serious response and that is what I am committed to having Congress provide for you, not just chainsaw the solutions to the problem. We have to focus in on where your needs are the greatest.

I thank you.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Senator Markey. I appreciate that.

I want to thank you both for being here. This has been very important, very insightful, very helpful, and whether it is law enforcement or personal experience it matters a lot to us.

We want to conclude this panel and we want to welcome our next panel. If they would please come forward to the witness table now.

Thank you both so much.

[Pause.]

Senator BUDD. Our second panel of witnesses today include Ms. Shannon Kelly, Assistant Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy, U.S. Interdiction Coordinator and Director, National High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program.

Ms. Kelly has more than two decades of counterdrug experience and worked previously for the U.S. Department of Justice and the National Drug Intelligence Center. Thank you for being here.

Rear Admiral Adam Chamie, U.S. Coast Guard Assistant Commandant for Response Policy. In this capacity he is responsible for developing strategic response doctrine and policy guidance for all Coast Guard forces, including covering law enforcement activities and border maritime security.

And last, Mr. Jonathan Miller, Executive Assistant Commissioner, Air and Marine Operations with U.S. Customs and Border Protection. His mission is to safeguard our Nation by anticipating and confronting security threats through aviation and maritime law enforcement.

Ms. Kelly, you are recognized for your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF SHANNON KELLY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR,  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY,  
U.S. INTERDICTION COORDINATOR, AND DIRECTOR,  
NATIONAL HIGH INTENSITY DRUG TRAFFICKING AREA  
(HIDTA) PROGRAM**

Ms. KELLY. Good afternoon.

First, I want to thank Ms. Ehlinger for sharing Jake's story with us. She is an eloquent and courageous spokesperson for the many Americans suffering from the illicit fentanyl crisis.

Senator Budd and distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to speak with you today about the challenges and opportunities facing our law enforcement partners as they combat illicit drug trafficking.

I am here today representing the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy where it is my privilege to serve as both the U.S. interdiction coordinator and the director of the National High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas program.

As the U.S. interdiction coordinator I advise the ONDCP director as we create policy and coordinate activities to reduce the flow of illicit drugs across our borders and into our communities.

Through its coordination function the USIC ensures a comprehensive and cogent approach to securing the Nation's borders, supporting the President's executive orders on ensuring the territorial integrity of the United States and addressing the national emergency at the southern and northern borders.

To make this direction efficient and effective I draft the applicable portions of the National Drug Control Strategy, the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan, and border interdiction strategies for the southern, northern and Caribbean borders of the United States.

The centerpiece of my team's work is the HIDTA program which provides Federal grant funds to areas determined to be critical drug trafficking regions of the United States. HIDTA allocates nearly \$300 million in Federal funding to support the strategies developed and implemented by coalitions of Federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial partners.

I deeply appreciate Congress' strong bipartisan support of the HIDTA program and want to personally thank you for your support for the HIDTA program. This support is critical because as we speak America is facing the deadliest drug threat in its history.

Over the past 25 years the number of fatal overdoses involving synthetic drugs including fentanyl have increased nearly 100 times and the illicit drug threat continues to transform.

We must dismantle the supply chains for illicit drugs and the raw materials and attack the global criminal networks fueling these American deaths. This includes the drug cartels that have inundated the United States with deadly drugs, violent criminals, and vicious gangs.

Our Federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial partners work tirelessly to interdict illicit drugs, weapons, and proceeds and to dismantle criminal networks wherever they reside. I look forward to telling you more about the outstanding work of these tireless patriots.

As a result of the recent executive order designating cartels and other organizations as foreign terrorist organizations and specially designated global terrorists, we expect to see additional authorities for law enforcement to investigate and dismantle these networks and place new pressure and threat of prosecution on entities that support and enable the cartels.

Law enforcement working to disrupt drug trafficking networks need access to telecommunications, automated license plate readers, financial transactions and illicit firearms data.

Developing and deploying these technologies is critical to investigative success. It is equally important these tools are used to maximize investigative efficacy while minimizing any risks to the privacy of innocent Americans.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and to share the perspective from the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Protecting Americans from illicit drugs and the traffickers who harm them is our mission. Our strong interagency partners, as rep-

resented by my fellow panelists from the Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection today, are key to disrupting and dismantling criminal networking organizations.

Collectively, our work is leading to real progress under President Trump's leadership and with your support I am confident we will continue to stop traffickers and save lives.

I am happy to respond to any questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Kelly follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SHANNON KELLY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF HOMELAND INTERDICTION AND SUPPLY DISRUPTION, OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY

Good morning, *Chairman Cruz*, *Ranking Member Cantwell*, and members of this committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about the challenges and opportunities facing our law enforcement partners with respect to illicit drug trafficking.

I'm here today representing the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

ONDCP leads and coordinates the national drug control policy to address drug trafficking, save lives, and improve the health and safety of the American people.

We oversee the National Drug Control Program Budget, which encompasses 19 Federal agencies and coordinates the Federal government's efforts to address the illicit drug threat, which is significant and growing.

I am here today as both the United States Interdiction Coordinator and the Director of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas, or HIDTA, Program. It is a privilege to serve in both roles.

#### **USIC**

As the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, or USIC, I provide the ONDCP Director advice regarding policy and coordination of interdiction activities to reduce the flow of illicit drugs into the United States, and integration with domestic efforts to prevent illicit drugs from crossing our borders and entering our communities. With coordination among the 28 senior leaders from across the government who are members of The Interdiction Committee, I am responsible for overseeing the interdiction activities of the National Drug Control Program agencies to ensure consistency with Presidential policy priorities.

The USIC's coordination function is vital to ensuring a comprehensive, cogent approach to securing the Nation's borders, in direct support of President Trump's Executive Orders on ensuring the territorial integrity of the United States and addressing the national emergency at the Southern and Northern Borders. To ensure this direction is efficient and effective, I draft and issue the applicable portions of the National Drug Control Strategy; the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan; and border interdiction strategies for the southern, northern, and Caribbean borders each year.

These documents focus on coordinated interdiction efforts by federal, state, local, Tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies, and promote strengthened collaboration with our international partners to maximize the impact of each interdiction event. Drug interdictions are vital not only for removing dangerous drugs immediately from the illicit supply chain, but also for providing cooperating witnesses, physical and digital evidence, and intelligence. These contributions are the foundation that the interagency community builds on to dismantle transnational criminal networks (TCNs). This coordination is becoming even more vital as we implement a strong response to President Trump's executive order designating of international cartels and other transnational criminal organizations, as foreign terrorist organizations, and organize the interdiction community to fully support national efforts to totally eliminate these organizations.

#### **HIDTA**

The centerpiece of my team's work is the HIDTA Program, which provides Federal grant funds to areas determined to be critical drug trafficking regions of the United States.

HIDTA allocates nearly \$300 million in Federal funding to support the strategies developed and implemented by coalitions of federal, state, local, Tribal, and territorial partners.

I greatly appreciate Congress's strong bipartisan support of the HIDTA Program, and I want to personally thank you, *Chairman Cruz* and *Ranking Member Cantwell*, for your support to the HIDTA program over the years.

Through its 33 regional programs, HIDTA brings together more than twenty thousand individual participants from 500 law enforcement agencies, focusing and integrating their efforts against the drug trafficking organizations that pose the greatest threat to our Nation. Through HIDTA collaboration, we are able to fully engage partners from across all levels of government to prioritize their investigations to fully align with the President's designated list of the most dangerous cartels.

To these ends, HIDTA-supported task forces annually disrupt or dismantle more than three thousand drug trafficking or money laundering organizations, and seize billions of dollars of illicit drugs.

### **Illicit Drug Threats**

As we speak, America is facing the deadliest drug threat in its history.

Over the past 25 years, the number of drug overdose deaths in the United States involving synthetic opioids, including fentanyl, have increased nearly 100 times.

During the same timeframe, the rate of fatal overdoses involving other drugs, including cocaine and methamphetamine, also rose. Since 1999, the number of drug overdose deaths involving cocaine and methamphetamine have increased nearly eight and 64 times, respectively.

While far too many lives are currently being lost due to drug overdose, we are starting to see signs that progress is being made to combat this crisis. The latest CDC provisional data predicts a 23.7 percent decrease<sup>i</sup> in drug overdose deaths for the 12-month period ending in September 2024, compared to the same time period a year prior. This is the largest recorded reduction in drug overdose deaths, and these reductions are being observed across all major drug classes.

While this is important progress, we must recognize that the illicit drug threat will continue to transform. This is not a challenge for the United States alone. Illicit drugs are a global problem, and the criminals who produce and traffic these drugs are determined and resilient, driven by increased profits and an increased global customer base. Illicit drugs produced outside the United States make their way across our borders and into our communities by a variety of means. Illicit fentanyl and methamphetamine often enter the United States through ports of entry. On occasion, cocaine is loaded onto semisubmersibles and go-fast boats that traverse the maritime approaches to the United States.

We recognize that the illicit drug supply chain is a multinational, complex network that spans public and private entities, utilizes legitimate commerce pipelines to move raw materials and finished drugs, and exploits our financial and banking systems to obtain profits and fund illicit activity.

Addressing this crisis calls for decisive, coordinated action.

We must dismantle the supply chains for illicit drugs and their raw materials, and attack the global criminal networks fueling American deaths, including the drug cartels that have inundated the United States with deadly drugs, violent criminals, and vicious gangs.

### **Seizing Drugs**

While we face substantial challenges in keeping these drugs from entering the United States, our Federal interdiction and law enforcement have achieved some noteworthy success.

In Fiscal Year 2024, HIDTA-supported task forces seized more than 20,000 pounds of illicit fentanyl, more than 277,000 pounds of methamphetamine, nearly 317,000 pounds of cocaine, and over 4,100 pounds of heroin.

My colleague from Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will provide more details on its work, but I want to highlight that in FY 2024, CBP seized almost 575,000 pounds of illicit drugs, approximately half of which was seized at Southwest Land Border ports of entry. That number includes nearly 22,000 pounds of fentanyl. There was also a nearly 25 percent increase in methamphetamine seizures in FY 2024 from the previous Fiscal Year, with nearly 175,000 pounds seized, primarily at the Southwest Border.

As we'll hear from the Coast Guard, maritime cocaine interdictions are vital inroads to dismantling criminal networks, particularly those in Mexico that both receive multi-ton loads of cocaine from South America, and at the same time produce fentanyl for distribution in U.S. markets. The Coast Guard has re-oriented its focus

<sup>i</sup>Per CDC data, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>. Accessed 21 Feb 2025.

to lean in on drug interdiction, and those efforts continue to be a vital tool for removing drugs and illuminating high-level criminal networks.

It's impossible to overstate the impact of seizing drugs before they slip across international borders, are broken down into smaller loads, and make their way along our highways and through our mail and package systems, and into our communities and homes.

Seized drugs represent lives saved—they are fatal overdoses that never happened, and profits that drug traffickers never received. Seizing dangerous and addictive substances, like fentanyl, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin, also is a critical component of preventing illicit drug use and substance use disorder in American citizens.

### **Disrupting Criminal Networks**

The integration of federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial efforts through task forces is critical to disrupting and dismantling criminal networks. To meet this need, HIDTA and the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) play complementary roles. This partnership enhances intelligence sharing, investigative capabilities, and operational effectiveness, enabling task forces to dismantle entire trafficking networks rather than just interdict individual shipments, creating a sustained impact.

Additionally, our partners at the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) have led government-wide efforts to map the cartels responsible for distributing deadly drugs like fentanyl. This entails combining DEA data with external data, and employing innovative analytic techniques to map and strategically target priority threat networks throughout the cartels' supply chain. The network illumination will provide the knowledge to develop cohesive and coordinated operations within DEA and across government agencies to most effectively dismantle, degrade, and defeat transnational drug cartels. These operations will target every stage of the cartels' business cycle, support structure, and facilitators.

Those teams are composed of special agents, intelligence analysts, targeters, program analysts, data scientists, and digital specialists.

DEA's Special Operation Division (SOD), is home to over 30 Federal and international partners, including Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigations (IRS-CI), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), FBI, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Australian Federal Police, and members of the Intelligence Community. SOD allows for the sharing, support, and coordination of work across the government and the globe, to identify and target drug trafficking networks. This includes the networks responsible for the chemicals and pre-cursor chemicals shipped to Mexico, the cartels who use those chemicals to produce fentanyl and other deadly synthetic drugs, the networks who smuggle the drugs into the United States, the local street distributors, and the global money laundering networks who repatriate the illicit proceeds back to the cartels.

Similarly, the HSI Innovation Lab is constantly developing new ways to combat transnational criminal networks more effectively. The HSI Innovation Lab brings together HSI investigators with data engineers and scientists to develop and utilize new technology for cross-referencing, analyzing, and triaging information to support some of the most complex cases. This team provides technical solutions, rapidly advanced analytical support, and priority access to HSI specialized resources.

The HSI-led DHS Cyber Crimes Center (C3) supports HSI's mission by providing investigative and operational support for complex transnational cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent investigations that have the highest potential impact against TCNs. C3's advanced support to combat TCNs includes applying the necessary technical solutions, advanced data and cryptocurrency analytical support, and priority access to HSI specialized resources.

C3 is also at the forefront of interagency collaboration and is a longstanding member of the FBI's Joint Criminal Opioid and Darknet Enforcement (JCODE) Team, which is a DOJ-sponsored initiative established in 2018, to combat the proliferation and distribution of fentanyl and other opioids via illicit darknet marketplaces. C3 actively collaborates with JCODE members to develop and distribute high-impact target packages to HSI and other JCODE member agency field offices. C3's expertise and efforts significantly contribute to HSI's seizure of \$190 million in cryptocurrency from transnational criminal organizations, many of which were associated with narcotics investigations.

Also, HSI's Cross-Border Financial Crime Center (CBFCC) has been designed to identify, target, and dismantle the financial networks that are utilized by transnational criminal networks that seek to launder their illicit proceeds from inside and outside of the United States. The CBFCC employs a strategy of utilizing the expertise of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies and their analyt-

ical capabilities to infiltrate and dismantle these financial networks. The CBFCC includes elements of HSI, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the Internal Revenue Service—Criminal Investigations (IRS–CI). Also included is the support from the HSI-led El Dorado Task Forces around the country which include HSI, DEA, United States Secret Service, IRS–CI, and state/local law enforcement.

This effort is a concerted, HSI-wide response to combat the transnational criminal networks that pose the greatest threats to the security of the United States, particularly those engaged in the production and distribution of illicit drugs like fentanyl.

Although DOD does not interdict or arrest drug traffickers, I would be remiss to not mention the valuable enabling role DOD plays in this area. In addition to leading the air and maritime detection and monitoring of drug trafficking, the DoD Counterdrug program provides the bulk of the U.S. government’s intelligence collection and analysis on foreign transnational criminal networks.

### **Protecting Mail and Package Systems**

Drug traffickers exploit the mail and express consignment service industry to obtain precursor chemicals and manufacturing equipment, and ship illicit drugs to their customers.

To combat this activity, CBP officers and HSI Special Agents assigned to Border Enforcement Security Task Forces (BESTs) have increased their presence, coordination, and inspections at international express consignment carrier (ECC) processing centers operated by United Parcel Service (UPS), Federal Express (FedEx), Dalsey, Hillblom, and Lynn (DHL), and others.

From 2021–2023, domestic task forces at ECC hubs seized nearly 59,000 pounds of illicit drugs from small parcels, including nearly 840 pounds of illicit fentanyl.

Also, the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) seized over 3,800 pounds of fentanyl and 7,700 pounds of methamphetamine from the domestic mail system in FY 2024, mostly originating from states surrounding the Southwest Border. The Postal Inspection Service continues to see a significant increase from FY 2023 in cocaine seizures, with over 6,000 pounds in FY 2024.

### **Targeting Illicit Proceeds**

Narcotics traffickers operating on a global scale require an extensive support network, including procurement, logistics, transportation, communications, security, money laundering, and other facilitation.

Major drug operations create, corrupt, and misuse supposedly legitimate enterprises to conduct criminal activity and launder vast profits on an international scale.

These illicitly-funded “corporate empires” can be extensive, complex, and can undermine the integrity of financial systems.

They are also one of transnational criminal organizations’ greatest vulnerabilities.

As a result, disrupting this illicit financial network is a national priority to help disrupt the flow of illicit fentanyl, its precursors, and related production equipment, such as pill presses.

In recent years, the Department of the Treasury received a new sanctions authority for combating the illicit drug trade.

Specifically, it received authorization to target any foreign person engaged in drug trafficking activities, regardless of whether they are linked to a specific kingpin or cartel, which further enables Treasury to sanction foreign persons who knowingly receive property that constitutes, or is derived from, proceeds of illicit drug trafficking activities.

Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has since designated 233 individuals and 167 entities under this new authority.

When OFAC designates an individual or entity, any assets within the United States or the possession or control of a United States person anywhere in the world must be frozen. Additionally, any money being transferred through the United States financial system may be seized, even if neither the sending nor receiving accounts are within the system. Since the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (or SWIFT) network is based in the United States, this limits any transfers within that network.

An OFAC designation also means trade with or through the United States is cut off. Often, businesses and banks not based in the United States voluntarily sever ties with individuals and entities that OFAC has listed.

As a result, designated persons may lose access to their bank accounts outside the United States, disrupting their operations and freedom of access.

In addition, in many cases, partner nation authorities have taken law enforcement actions against designated companies or properties after OFAC has listed them.

In addition to sanctions, since 2021, the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs has made public up to \$410 million in reward offers for information leading to the arrest or conviction of 80 different wanted individuals. Some of these, from both China and Mexico, are involved in the fentanyl supply chain and have been captured through the Narcotics and Transnational Organized Crime Rewards Programs.

As a result of the recent Executive Order Designating Cartels and other organizations as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and specially designated Global Terrorists, we expect to see additional tools and authorities for our law enforcement officers to investigate and dismantle these organizations, placing new pressure and threat of prosecution on entities that support and enable the cartels.

#### **Protecting Investigative Tools**

Directly or indirectly, a number of the approaches I've noted so far depend upon the widespread availability of key investigative tools.

Law enforcement working to disrupt drug trafficking networks need access to telecommunications, automated license plate readers, financial transactions, and crime gun tracking data.

Developing and deploying these technologies is critical to investigative success, but it is equally important that these tools are used to maximize investigative efficacy while minimizing any risks to the privacy of innocent Americans.

This is increasingly important as we contemplate the use of groundbreaking technologies, such as artificial intelligence.

Trust is a pillar of law enforcement. It's integral to the multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional efforts that have yielded great successes.

It's also critical to the relationships that all law enforcement agencies maintain with the citizens they protect.

I'm grateful to all our law enforcement partners for their forward-looking approach to the use of new technologies, and their commitment to use these tools effectively and responsibly.

#### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning and to share the perspective from the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Protecting Americans from illicit drugs and the traffickers who harm them is a key mission for the Federal government. Our strong interagency partnerships are working tirelessly to disrupt and dismantle criminal trafficking organizations and it's leading to real progress under President Trump's leadership. With your support, I am confident we will continue to stop traffickers and save lives.

I am happy to respond to any questions you have.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Ms. Kelly.

Admiral Chamie, you are recognized for your opening statement.

#### **STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL ADAM CHAMIE, ASSISTANT COMMANDANT FOR RESPONSE POLICY, U.S. COAST GUARD**

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Good afternoon, Senator Budd and distinguished members of the Committee. I request that my written testimony be submitted for the record.

Senator BUDD. Without objection.

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Thank you, sir.

Thank you for your continued support of the United States Coast Guard and the young men and women who selflessly volunteer to serve our Nation.

Throughout our 234-year career our workforce has always been our greatest strength and I am incredibly proud to serve alongside them.

I very much appreciate the title of this hearing, "A View From the Front Lines." It is a good reminder for me of why I am here today to share with you the successes and challenges of our crews who do the mission every day.

Throughout my time in uniform the best part of my job has always been bragging about my crews, and now sitting before you I

am honored to share just two of their success stories over the past month.

On February 2, Coast Guard Cutter *Joseph Doyle* and a Coast Guard aircraft were patrolling south of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The cutter stopped and boarded a go-fast vessel, seizing 2,000 pounds of cocaine and detaining three Venezuelan smugglers.

Thanks to the crew of that cutter and aircraft they kept over \$16 million of drugs off American streets.

On January 23, the crew of Coast Guard Cutter *Waesche* was patrolling far off the coast of Mexico when the crew spotted a go-fast vessel with three outboard engines.

The Coast Guard helicopter employed their precision marksmen to shoot the outboards and the boarding team seized six tons of cocaine valued at almost \$100 million and they detained 10 smugglers from Mexico and Ecuador.

In all of Fiscal Year 2024 the Coast Guard interdicted 106 tons of cocaine with a street value of \$3.2 billion and detained 213 smugglers. That sounds good, but I would call it an average year.

This year our crews have interdicted 108 tons of cocaine and they have already surpassed last year's total only 5 months into the Fiscal Year.

This pace, however, is not sustainable. For every drug interdiction each crew has countless stories of engine casualties, electronics failures, and just last week one cutter discovered a hole in the side of the ship with seawater pouring in.

Making our crews' lives even tougher, when they order the parts to make repairs sometimes we do not have them on the shelf or they are not even available, and sometimes we take the parts off a ship returning to port so another ship can go out to sea. Our crews know we are the world's best Coast Guard but we need to do a better job to make them feel that way.

I have talked a lot about cocaine because bulk cocaine is smuggled at sea. The interdiction of cocaine matters because the same cartels who smuggle cocaine produce and smuggle fentanyl.

When we interdict the smugglers at sea we work with our inter-agency partners in the intelligence community to determine who these criminals are, which cartels employ them, and how and where these cartels operate.

Cocaine is the cash crop for transnational criminal organizations, the cartels. Their huge profits from cocaine fund other nefarious activities like human smuggling, weapons trafficking, and production of synthetic drugs like fentanyl.

Fentanyl is the leading cause of drug-related deaths in our country but cocaine still kills upwards of 25,000 Americans every year.

Although we rarely encounter fentanyl at sea the Coast Guard is actively finding new ways to get after this problem. We are working alongside Federal, state, local, tribal, and international partners to protect the American people and ensure our national security remains strong.

The Coast Guard does a lot of things but we do not do it alone. Whether in the field, in a skiff, or in a courtroom we count on each other every day to achieve mission success.

We proudly serve alongside the Department of Defense, our many homeland components like Customs and Border Protection



and Homeland Security investigations, and with the Department of State and Department of Justice, just to name a few.

On behalf of our acting commandant and our entire work force—active duty, reserve, civilian, and auxiliary—thank you for your enduring support of the United States Coast Guard.

I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Rear Admiral Chamie follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL ADAM A. CHAMIE,  
ASSISTANT COMMANDANT FOR RESPONSE POLICY, U.S. COAST GUARD,  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

### **Introduction**

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify and for your continued support of the United States Coast Guard and the Department of Homeland Security generally. I look forward to discussing the Coast Guard's maritime drug interdiction operations. We have a proud history of protecting and defending our Nation by ensuring our economic prosperity and national security in the maritime domain since the founding of the Revenue Marine in 1790. Today, our efforts remain focused on guarding our Nation against maritime border threats and conducting all of the Coast Guard's 11 statutory missions.

As our Acting Commandant highlighted in recent Service-wide guidance, controlling our maritime borders and approaches, including conducting maritime drug interdiction, is a priority for the Trump Administration and a critical function of the Coast Guard. We are particularly qualified to answer the call to safeguard the homeland. In Fiscal Year 2024, the Coast Guard removed over 106 metric tons of cocaine, bringing our six-year total to 873.5 metric tons removed. While a substantial amount, it would be much higher if we had more available interdiction and detection assets—Coast Guard cutters and aircraft, and Navy ships—to conduct these critical operations.

The multitude of Coast Guard missions necessarily create competing demands for these limited assets, specifically on interdicting drugs in the maritime transit zone. Assets that could otherwise be targeting drug traffickers are also needed to maintain elevated cutter presence in support of Homeland Security Task Force Southeast to counter illegal maritime migration, provide support to Administration priorities in the Indo-Pacific, assure presence in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska to deter Russia and People's Republic of China, and advance the global effort to counter illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The Coast Guard continuously assesses demands and strategically employs assets to maximize effectiveness and mitigate risk to the Nation—we do a lot, but we strive to do much more. The trafficking of illegal drugs poses an exigent threat to the American people, and the men and women of the Coast Guard continue to do everything in their power to remove cocaine and other contraband before they reach our shores and our citizens.

Of equal importance as cocaine removals in 2024 are the 288 drug smugglers detained for U.S. or foreign prosecution as a result of Coast Guard interdictions. Those individuals and associated evidence provided critical information to advance Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Justice (DOJ) investigations into smuggling networks that present a larger threat to U.S. border security. The same transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) engaging in cocaine smuggling are also responsible for trafficking people and other drugs, including fentanyl and its precursors, into the U.S. while creating instability in the source and transit zones in Latin America and the Caribbean, at the Southern Border, and throughout our hemisphere. Coast Guard interdictions of bulk quantity cocaine decrease TCO profit margins, while also providing valuable information to aid our investigative partners. The Coast Guard is postured to disrupt illegal trafficking in the maritime environment to advance the broader United States goals to secure the Nation's borders and help dismantle TCOs.

### **Drug Trafficking—Overview**

Mexico-based TCOs transship much of the cocaine consumed in the U.S. through Central America and the Caribbean using licit commercial shipping companies and illicit drug trafficking shipping networks. The Coast Guard's cutter fleet and versatile Tactical Law Enforcement Teams (TACLETs) operating from U.S. Navy and allied warships target bulk cocaine movements typically originating from Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, pushing the U.S. borders out hundreds of miles

from land. Two major drug transit corridors exist in the Western Hemisphere: the Eastern Pacific and the Caribbean. In the Eastern Pacific, there are multiple vectors used to move bulk cocaine; however, traffickers generally land contraband between Costa Rica and Mexico for further shipment to the U.S. In the western Caribbean Sea, bulk cocaine is typically trafficked through Honduras or Nicaragua through Mexico and moved across the Southwest Border into the U.S. In the central and eastern Caribbean, the bulk smuggling destinations are typically the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico. Approximately 60 to 65 percent of the cocaine destined for the U.S. flows through the Eastern Pacific corridor, while 35 to 40 percent moves through the Caribbean Sea.

### **National Drug Control Strategy & the Coast Guard's Role**

Since 1989, the National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) has emphasized the global reach of U.S. enforcement and interdiction efforts to address both illicit drug supply and demand. The Trump Administration's deliberate focus on combatting TCOs and securing our borders reinforces the value of the Coast Guard's capabilities. Historically, drug interdiction missions sought to reduce supply, and were supported by our cutters, boarding teams, and aircraft. However, our role has advanced beyond mere presence and operations on and over the water. As a member of the Intelligence Community, the Coast Guard works across the government to collect, analyze and share critical information to target TCOs and drug trafficking terrorists.

The Commandant of the Coast Guard serves as the Chair of The Interdiction Committee (TIC), which is the Office of National Drug Control Policy's (ONDCP) senior interagency forum attended by drug interdiction officials from 26 departments and agencies. Last year, TIC principals convened in San Juan, Puerto Rico to review issues related to the coordination, oversight, and integration of international, border, and domestic drug interdiction efforts. It highlighted the unique counter-drug challenges from Panama north into the U.S. waters and territories of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which are on the front lines of our south-east U.S. border, and the broader drug interdiction concerns we face as Nation.

In addition to our role within TIC, Coast Guard Flag Officers lead the U.S. Southern Command's Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S) and Indo-Pacific Command's Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF-W). These task forces are charged with executing the Department of Defense's (DoD) Title 10 responsibility for the detection and monitoring of illicit aerial and maritime drug trafficking, while efficiently coordinating interdiction operations conducted by Coast Guard, the interagency, allies, and partner nations.

### **Drug Interdiction Operations**

The Coast Guard works closely with JIATF-S and JIATF-W to target illicit narcotics and fentanyl precursor flows. While we strive for U.S. interdictions to support investigations by our DHS and DOJ partners, we look to coordinate a partner nation response when a U.S. interdiction is not possible. In Fiscal Year 2024, partner nations contributed to approximately 80 percent of documented JIATF-S cocaine disruptions, while the Coast Guard provided actionable intelligence to European law enforcement partners on trans-Atlantic cocaine movement, accounting for an additional 76.6 metric tons disrupted. This was the largest percentage of partner nation contributions on record; a promising trend indicating the increased capability and willingness of our partners to collaborate on this important mission. In a recent six-week period from December 20, 2024, to January 31, 2025, the Coast Guard positioned multiple assets in the Eastern Pacific to successfully conduct 32 interdictions, seize over 43 metric tons of cocaine and detain 85 smugglers for transfer to Department of Justice Organized Crime Task Forces for prosecution and further investigation. On February 13, 2025, in California, a Coast Guard cutter off-loaded over 16.9 metric tons of cocaine with an estimated street value of over \$275.7 million that will never be sold to poison the American people.

While a multitude of Coast Guard assets engage in counterdrug operations, our National Security Cutters have proven to be our most effective platform for this mission, especially when combined with a force package consisting of an embarked helicopter and a small-unmanned aircraft. Just last month, Coast Guard Cutter (CGC) *James* responded to three suspected smuggling vessels in their operating area. The cutter simultaneously launched three small boats and their airborne use-of-force capable helicopter, successfully stopping all three suspect vessels. With these suspected smuggling vessels being subject to U.S. jurisdiction under the Maritime Drug Law Enforcement Act, the cutter's crew conducted lawful boardings and seized over six metric tons of cocaine and detained nine Ecuadorian smugglers. This successful operation was part of an even more impressive week, with CGC *James* interdicting a total of six cocaine-laden smuggling vessels.

### **Fentanyl**

Fentanyl is a major U.S. counterdrug priority and has been the leading cause of U.S. drug-related deaths since 2016, accounting for approximately 70 percent of U.S. drug overdose deaths in 2023. Mexican TCOs are the primary source of synthetic opioid flow into the U.S., predominantly across our Southwest Border. While bulk fentanyl has yet to be encountered in the maritime domain, the Coast Guard is leveraging all of our authorities, capabilities, and policies to seek out and interdict both fentanyl and precursor chemicals. On January 31, 2025, the Acting Commandant directed immediate action to bolster operations to combat illegal fentanyl and the Service is seeking new ways to leverage our broad authorities and partnerships with other agencies.

Coast Guard drug interdictions, while historically focused on cocaine and marijuana, are critical to the whole-of-government effort to combat TCOs. Cocaine interdictions at sea cut off a critical source of funding for the same Mexican TCOs that produce and smuggle fentanyl, impairing their efforts to produce and smuggle fentanyl into the United States. Beyond our efforts on the water and in the ports, Coast Guard intelligence personnel work closely with our Intelligence Community partners to combat TCOs that threaten the U.S. by providing valuable and actionable information targeting suspected smuggling terrorists.

### **Partnerships**

As the United States' lead maritime law enforcement agency, the Coast Guard has a broad range of authorities and a network of interagency and international partnerships that enable us to conduct law enforcement operations on the high seas to combat threats far from U.S. borders. The Coast Guard conducts drug interdiction operations over a six-million square mile transit zone, and the Service depends on robust partnerships for mission success. Drug interdiction is a large-scale operation, and a Service of our size relies on like-minded partners to drive our whole-of-government effort to target TCOs that threaten our Nation.

The Coast Guard relies on over 40 counterdrug bilateral and multilateral international agreements and arrangements with stakeholder nations to enable seamless, coordinated law enforcement efforts against TCOs. These agreements and arrangements are critical to Coast Guard drug interdiction successes, as they allow our law enforcement teams to conduct boardings of foreign-flagged vessels and promote time-critical partner nation coordination during high-seas drug interdiction operations. The Coast Guard works closely with the Department of State (DOS) to improve the effectiveness of partner nations' counterdrug efforts by negotiating, securing, and managing those agreements.

In addition to exercising international agreements and arrangements, the Coast Guard relies on allies and international partners to provide assets, collaborate on operations, and share intelligence to eradicate maritime trafficking. We coordinate operations with, and regularly deploy Coast Guard law enforcement teams aboard allied vessels (*e.g.*, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Canada), and work closely with partner nations throughout South and Central America and the Caribbean to dismantle regional maritime trafficking networks.

Force packages consisting of allied partner assets, augmented with small Coast Guard TACLETs provide tremendously high operational return on investment. In late January 2025, we deployed a team of 10 Coast Guard law enforcement personnel aboard a Royal Netherlands Navy ship, and, within 48 hours of operational certification, they interdicted a boat 30 miles off the coast of Venezuela, seizing nearly three metric tons of cocaine and detaining five Venezuelan and Colombian suspected traffickers.

The DoD-Coast Guard partnership is also critical to the Nation's drug interdiction mission and our collective ability to succeed. While DoD is the lead Federal agency for the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transits of illegal drugs into the United States, the Coast Guard leverages unique law enforcement authorities to serve as the lead agency for the interdiction and apprehension of vessels suspected of engaging in maritime drug trafficking. The Coast Guard's role as a law enforcement agency, an armed force, and a member of the Intelligence Community allows us to leverage our vital suite of authorities and capabilities in various ways throughout the interdiction process, unique among cooperating agencies.

Similarly, the Coast Guard maintains close connections with DOJ to prosecute cases and investigate TCO networks. In addition to engagement on various DOJ-led interagency task forces, the Coast Guard assigns judge advocates who serve as Special Assistant United States Attorneys to work side-by-side with DOJ attorneys in the U.S. Attorney's Offices who prosecute the majority of significant maritime drug cases. This model is highly successful and allows the Coast Guard to bring its maritime counterdrug expertise into the courtroom.

Within DHS, a Coast Guard flag officer leads Joint Task Force East (JTF-EAST), which is responsible for coordinating activities and operations across DHS components (*i.e.*, Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) to protect the U.S. Southeast Border and maritime approaches. In 2024, Caribbean coalition efforts across synchronized, enduring operations resulted in the interdiction of 538 illegal Aliens, 71.4 metric tons of cocaine, 339 illegal firearms, and over 26,000 rounds of ammunition. Working with JIATF-S, allies, and international partners, we have improved unified efforts to disrupt TCOs in the Caribbean.

#### **Conclusion**

The Coast Guard continues to provide tremendous value to the United States through our maritime drug interdiction operations. We strive to control the maritime border in direct support of President's Trump's recent Executive Orders and direction from Homeland Security Secretary Noem. We will continue to address surface fleet challenges and competing mission demands to ensure the Coast Guard remains well-positioned to assist in dismantling TCOs, interdicting illegal narcotics, and prosecuting those responsible. The continued success of Coast Guard counterdrug operations hinges on continued investment in the Service—recruiting motivated people, providing them with the proper tools, and empowering them to serve the Nation. Congress' continued support will help the world's best Coast Guard meet these global demands.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your continued support of the Coast Guard. I would be pleased to answer your questions.

Senator BLACKBURN [presiding]. And, Mr. Miller, you are recognized.

#### **STATEMENT OF JONATHAN MILLER, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, AIR AND MARINE OPERATIONS, U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION (CBP)**

Mr. MILLER. Senator Blackburn, Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and distinguished members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today on behalf of the men and women of Air Marine Operations to discuss our critical role in interdicting illicit drugs in U.S. territorial waters and maritime approaches as part of U.S. Customs and Border Protection's comprehensive approach to border security.

While AMO has existed in its current form for less than 20 years its origins trace back to the legacy of U.S. Customs Service and we continue to meet a longstanding need for specialized air and maritime border security capabilities.

Our operators are sworn Federal law enforcement agents with a broad range of authorities to conduct counter narcotic operations across land, air, and sea domains.

Maritime domain presents unique national security challenges. Unlike air and land environments, coastal waters are vast, less restricted spaces.

Countless vessels enter or operate in U.S. territorial waters every day, making detection of illegal activity and apprehending associated smugglers challenging.

Many smuggling crafts hide in plain sight amongst legitimate traffic while others transit remote areas far offshore trying to elude detection altogether.

Smugglers also use a variety of vessels tailored to the area and amount of contraband they are smuggling to best evade detection including modified fishing boats, go-fast vessels, pangas, low-profile vessels, and semi submersibles.

Vessels are also much faster than they were 20 years ago, often leaving law enforcement little time to interdict them before reaching our shores.

Drug smuggling activity in the maritime environment is a perpetual and dangerous threat to U.S. border security. Of the 234 pounds of drugs AMO seized in Fiscal Year 2024 approximately 76 percent occurred in the maritime environment.

In addition to high maritime drug interdiction rates, smuggler aggression and violence has also been on the rise. Since 2006, AMO has used disabling fire on the engines of fleeing smuggling vessels nearly 350 times with more than half of those happening in the last 4 years.

In November 2022 three of our marine interdiction agents were shot and one, Michel Maceda, was tragically killed during a vessel stop with smugglers off the coast of Puerto Rico.

The threat of illicit maritime activity is persistent and dynamic but AMO is dedicated and adaptable. We are continually refining our capabilities and adjusting our tactics to stay ahead of these ever evolving threats.

AMO deploys a fleet of what I believe to be some of the most powerful law enforcement marine interceptors in the world. Evolving to meet today's threats we have recently repowered these vessels and made other modifications to this platform for a perfect mix of speed, agility, and agent safety.

AMO also maintains a fleet of aircraft functionally designed and outfitted for maritime detection and surveillance. Our P-3s, DHC-8s, and MQ-9 UAS aircraft provide long-range, high-endurance capabilities in remote source and transit zones while the Super King Air 350 multi-role enforcement aircraft further expands aerial surveillance, closing detection enforcement gaps in the littorals of the United States and the Caribbean.

AMO is heavily invested in a variety of tethered aero stats and tactical systems, providing ground-based radar and sensor capabilities that significantly increase our domain awareness along our littoral borders and the maritime approaches around Puerto Rico, south Texas into the Gulf, the Florida straits, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the northern border.

The scale and complexity of countering drug trafficking in the maritime environment requires partnerships and operational collaboration.

In addition to the U.S. Coast Guard, AMO routinely works with Federal, state, local, and foreign partners and is one of the largest contributors of flight hours to Joint Interagency Task Force South, supporting counternarcotics operations in the vast 42 million square mile source and transit zones.

With a fleet designed for rapid interdiction, airborne and ground assets that provide critical domain awareness and agents with extensive law enforcement experience, AMO brings a unique capability to detect and disrupt smuggling operations before they reach our shores.

With few exceptions AMO's marine law enforcement authority is limited to customs waters, or 12 nautical miles from the coastline of the United States. CBP continues to work with Congress on leg-

islative changes to extend the Customs' waters from 12 to 24 nautical miles.

This extension of law enforcement authorities would enable AMO to more effectively enforce U.S. laws at sea, expand our counter-narcotics operations, support our partners, and carry out our border security mission.

Senator Blackburn, Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Miller follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JONATHAN P. MILLER,  
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, AIR AND MARINE OPERATIONS, U.S. CUSTOMS  
AND BORDER PROTECTION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

### **Introduction**

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and distinguished Members of the Committee, it is a privilege to appear before you today to discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Air and Marine Operations' (AMO) unwavering commitment to enforcing U.S. laws, interdicting illegal drugs, and securing our Nation's borders. As a frontline law enforcement component of CBP, AMO actively detects, deters, and disrupts illicit drug activity at the border and beyond.

Born out of the legacy U.S. Customs Service, AMO was established in 2006 as an integral part of CBP's comprehensive border security mission and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) risk-based and multi-layered approach to national security. AMO agents are credentialed Federal law enforcement officers<sup>1</sup> with a broad range of authorities that enable them to operate in the land, air, and sea domains, providing a critical layer of continuity in counternarcotics operations.

AMO's unique positioning—its legal authorities, specialized assets, and operational capabilities—allows it to detect and interdict illicit drug activity beyond our Nation's border. Operating in source and transit zones, between ports of entry, in coastal waters, and interior waterways, AMO protects the United States against criminal drug smuggling networks, including Mexican cartels, seeking to exploit our maritime domain and approaches, among other threats.

### **State of the Maritime Border**

Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) continue to escalate their efforts to infiltrate our borders and flooding American communities with illegal and deadly drugs. These criminal organizations operate with immense capability, capacity, and nearly unlimited resources. Their illegal drug production operations are sophisticated, and they continually adjust their tactics, techniques, and routes to circumvent detection and interdiction by law enforcement.

Illicit activity in the maritime environment is a threat to U.S. border security. The maritime domain is generally less restricted than the air and land environments and connects to more than 95,000 miles of U.S. shoreline. Thousands of vessels enter or operate in U.S. territorial waters every day. While the vast majority operate for recreation or legitimate commerce, some engage in smuggling and other illegal activity. Detecting illegal activity and apprehending any associated smuggling can be challenging, as many smuggling crafts hide in plain sight amongst legitimate traffic, while others transit remote areas far offshore to try to elude detection. Additionally, smugglers use a variety of crafts tailored to the area and amount of contraband they are smuggling to best evade detection, including modified fishing boats, go-fast vessels, pangas, low profile vessels, and semi-submersibles. Vessels are much faster than they were twenty years ago, often leaving law enforcement little time to interdict them before reaching our shores.

AMO continues to encounter increased risk and violence in the course of its role in intercepting smugglers in the maritime environment. Since its establishment, AMO has used disabling fire on the engines of fleeing smuggler vessels nearly 350 times. Additionally, in November 2022, three AMO Marine Interdiction Agents were shot, with one tragically being killed during a vessel stop with smugglers off the coast of Puerto Rico.<sup>2</sup> Precise engagement and rapid neutralization of risk is key to

<sup>1</sup> 6 U.S.C. § 211(f); 19 U.S.C. § 1589a; 8 U.S.C. § 1357

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/speeches-and-statements/cbp-marine-interdiction-agent-dies-line-duty-near-puerto-rico>

safely resolving water-based law enforcement actions. AMO continually refines its maritime interdiction capabilities and tactics to meet ever evolving threats.

#### **AMO's Maritime Counternarcotics Operations**

AMO remains at the forefront of the Nation's efforts to combat maritime drug smuggling and continues to intercept tons of dangerous illicit drugs every year, keeping them from reaching our shores and communities. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, AMO enforcement efforts led to the seizure of 233,662 pounds of drugs.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 76 percent of these seizures occurred in the maritime environment, with AMO enforcement actions leading to the seizure of 162,269 pounds of cocaine, 15,113 pounds of marijuana, and 172 pounds of methamphetamine.

#### *Maritime Enforcement Authorities*

Despite AMO's unique cross-domain law enforcement capabilities, in the maritime environment, with few exceptions,<sup>4</sup> AMO's maritime law enforcement authority<sup>5</sup> is generally limited to areas within the historical "customs waters"<sup>6</sup>—or 12 nautical miles from the coastline—of the United States. This geographic constraint challenges AMO's ability to effectively counter current and evolving modern threats and situations. Specifically, as modern technology continues to change and expand rapidly, the performance and speed of maritime vessels improves, including those used to violate U.S. law or evade U.S. law enforcement, the 12 nautical mile limit no longer provides responding law enforcement with sufficient time to interdict such vessels. This affects our ability to decide how and where to conduct engagement with suspect vessels, often preventing AMO's interdiction of vessels in time to prevent their escape, placing our law enforcement capability at a significant disadvantage.

CBP continues to work with Congress on legislative changes to extend the customs waters from 12 nautical miles to 24 nautical miles consistent with Presidential Proclamation 7219. This extension of law enforcement authorities would enable AMO to more effectively enforce U.S. laws at sea as well as increasing presence further from shore where we have saved lives at sea.

AMO is committed to its maritime security mission and continues to make investments in its highly trained agents, vessels, aircraft, and technological capabilities to advance the effectiveness of its operations. These investments support AMO's ongoing ability to effectively respond to illegal drug activity in the maritime environment, but also contribute to other AMO enforcement actions, including those that led to over 1,000 arrests and the seizure of 1,500 weapons and \$12.6 million in U.S. currency in FY 2024.

#### *Interdiction Assets, Capabilities, and Technology*

In support of its maritime border security mission, AMO deploys a fleet of high-speed Coastal Interceptor Vessels engineered for rapid pursuit and interdiction of non-compliant vessels. These vessels are crewed by highly trained agents authorized to use all necessary force, including warning shots and disabling fire to stop fleeing vessels.

In addition to our maritime interdiction efforts with our marine interceptors on the water, we also contribute a significant amount of air assets to these operations. AMO's fleet of maritime patrol aircraft are functionally designed and outfitted for maritime detection and surveillance. The P-3s and DHC-8 aircraft provide long range, high-endurance capabilities in remote source and transit zones while the Super King Air 350 Multi-Role Enforcement Aircraft (MEA) further expand aerial surveillance, closing detection and enforcement gaps in the Caribbean. Equipped with advanced sensors, communications, and radar systems, these aircraft are credited with the interdiction of 150,380 pounds of cocaine and 11,670 flight hours within the Western Hemisphere Transit Zones in FY 2024, which equated to 13 pounds of narcotics interdicted per flight hour.

The use of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) in the maritime environment has also increased AMO's ability to effectively identify, detect, monitor, and track conveyances involved in illegal activity. In partnership with DHS's Science and Tech-

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics/air-and-marine-operations-statistics>

<sup>4</sup> In certain circumstances, AMO is authorized to operate on the high seas, for instance when enforcing laws on U.S. registered vessels (19 C.F.R. § 162.3), hovering vessels (19 U.S.C. § 1401(k); 19 U.S.C. § 1587(a)), and vessels subject to hot pursuit (19 U.S.C. § 1581(d)). Additionally, beyond the customs waters, AMO may enforce the Maritime Drug Law Enforcement Act (46 U.S.C. § 70501–70502), where appropriate.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g. 19 U.S.C. § 1581, 1587, 1589a.

<sup>6</sup> 19 U.S.C. §§ 1401(j), 1709(c).

nology Directorate, AMO modified two MQ-9s to BigWing variants, significantly increasing fuel capacity and flight endurance. In addition to the added operational reach, these Big Wing aircraft have the added ability to surveil surface targets much longer while awaiting interdiction surface forces to arrive. AMO has been employing UAS in the maritime environment since 2020, contributing to the seizure of over 81,000 pounds of cocaine and 46,000 pounds of marijuana.

AMO is heavily invested in a variety of ground-based radars and sensors increasing maritime domain awareness along our littoral borders. We've taken tethered aero stats traditionally used for air detection only and integrated maritime surface radars. These have illuminated maritime approaches around Puerto Rico, South Texas into the Gulf, and the Florida Straits with future sites planned for Southern California. Other tower and ground-based radar systems have provided additional radar detection around Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands, South Florida, and the Great Lakes. Over the last three years, these systems have contributed to the seizure of over 17,200 pounds of cocaine, 15,600 pounds of fish from illicit fishing practices, and \$2 million in U.S. currency.

Advanced technology, including the BigPipe real-time video system and the Minotaur mission integration system, link AMO's tactical assets, aircraft, and vessels, thereby providing AMO with a streamlined and efficient information collecting and sharing capability. The Air and Marine Operations Center (AMOC) simultaneously tracks, processes, and integrates multiple sensor feeds and sources of information to provide comprehensive domain awareness in support of CBP's border security mission. Artificial intelligence and machine learning initiatives at AMO are improving threat detection efforts by processing vast amounts of surveillance data in real time. AMO will continue to modernize its fleet and sensor systems to enhance its data analysis capabilities and operational performance in diverse marine environments and increase its ability to adapt to the challenges of securing the maritime border and approaches to the United States.

#### *Operational Coordination*

AMO leverages its capabilities in the maritime environment by forging effective operational partnerships with USCG, the United States Navy, and a variety of federal, state, local, tribal, and foreign partners. AMO works closely with DHS Joint Task Force East (JTF-E) and is one of the largest contributors of flight hours to Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S) supporting counternarcotics operations in the vast 42 million square mile source and transit zones spanning the Pacific, Atlantic, and Caribbean areas of operation. Frequent cooperation with foreign partners is imperative, and over the last few years we've increased focus on the Eastern Caribbean and strengthened partnerships with the foreign countries and island nations throughout the Lesser Antilles, thus creating a force multiplier of surveillance and interdiction assets throughout the Southern approaches to Puerto Rico.

#### **Conclusion**

AMO's efforts are a cornerstone of CBP's border security mission, its capabilities crucial for intercepting contraband and disrupting illicit activity before it reaches our shores.

Since its creation in 2006, AMO has evolved into a key component of the Homeland Security enterprise and one of the largest civilian aviation and maritime law enforcement aviation and maritime forces in the world. As a critical component of CBP, AMO remains fully engaged in safeguarding the Nation by anticipating and confronting security threats through aviation and maritime law enforcement, innovative capabilities, and partnerships at the border and beyond. This mission is achieved by monitoring thousands of miles of air, maritime, and land borders around the clock; defending the United States against terrorist threats; detecting and deterring illicit trafficking of persons, drugs, weapons, money, and other goods; and disrupting criminal networks.

Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I look forward to answering your questions.

#### **STATEMENT OF HON. MARSHA BLACKBURN, U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE**

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you, Mr. Miller.

Ms. Kelly, I want to come to you with my first question. I am looking forward to introducing a bill that would reauthorize HIDTA



at an increased funding level, and in Tennessee I have heard from so many of our law enforcement personnel how important this is.

I want you just to speak for about 30 seconds what would happen if we did not have this?

Ms. KELLY. Thank you so much, Senator Blackburn, for your support and for the question.

I think what we have heard persistently from in particular our state and local partners is that the HIDTA program is essential for the coordination of Federal, state, local task forces.

We heard from the first panel how important it is for the Federal Government to engage with the partners, the 18,000 sheriff's departments, and police departments across the Nation who otherwise, without the framework and the structure of the HIDTA program may not be equipped to share information freely to coordinate on these cases and to make sure that we have a holistic whole scope of government response to dismantling the criminal networks that are trafficking fentanyl from the Southwest border all the way through the interior of the United States into every state and territory across the country.

Senator BLACKBURN. I appreciate that you all talked about our borders and what is coming in in shipping containers from China and the—what we are seeing in our ports but in Tennessee we have got the Mississippi River and the port in Memphis.

And what I would like to hear from you is what we can do, how your agencies are working on these inland rivers, and I know the FBI put a memo out warning of increased China influence on the Mississippi River.

So, Mr. Miller, I am going to start with you and just go down the line. I would like to hear what you all are doing when it comes to our inland waterways.

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Senator.

So AMO has marine units in the Gulf. I would say the biggest impact in terms of our inland waterways is the support that we provide to state and local agencies in the area to include task forces.

We provide aerial surveillance with flight enforcement helicopters with specific capabilities to track narcotics smugglers or any kind of trafficking that state and local agencies are working and we provide greater officer safety during buy bust operations or high-risk warrant operations.

Senator BLACKBURN. OK. Admiral?

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Good afternoon, Senator.

Ma'am, we work across the interagency with all our partners throughout Homeland, also state, local, Federal and tribal to get after a lot of these problems. The Coast Guard is a multi-mission service, so many of the same crew members who might be doing a search and rescue case one moment could be boarding a vessel that is coming in potentially with illegal narcotics.

The ability to shift between missions is a critical capability of the Coast Guard and that is fed by intelligence.

The Coast Guard is a member of the intelligence community and we work across the IC to help put our cutters and crews in places where we know the worst problems will be so that we can effectively respond.

Senator BLACKBURN. Ms. Kelly?

Ms. KELLY. I appreciate that my co-panelists have both mentioned information sharing. HIDTA, as you know, is a key framework for sharing information from our Federal partners down through our state and locals who, in many instances, are the ones actually enforcing the drug laws, particularly in some of our more rural and remote areas.

Senator BLACKBURN. Rear Admiral, I would like to come to you on this. I think it is helpful that President Trump has identified the cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, and so as we look at dealing with these cartels is there any further authority that the Coast Guard needs in order to apprehend and to work in this process with the IC?

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Good afternoon, Senator.

I am very appreciative that the President has designated these cartels as terrorist organizations. I think that sends a message that we as a government are deadly serious and are bringing all of our assets and resources to bear to get after this problem.

I would be happy to answer the question for the record with a list of additional authorities that we might be able to use to get at that.

Senator BLACKBURN. That would be very helpful. That is the kind of information we need.

My time has expired. Senator Cantwell, you are recognized.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the second group of panel witnesses who have been on the front lines of fighting this. Very much appreciate your being here today.

I wanted to start with you, Director Kelly, just in comments about the legislation that we introduced last year you were supportive of that, which I appreciate.

But this whole area of how to build capacity at attacking the transportation networks we heard from Spokane Chief Hall about why this worked and why it does work, right, in the sense of the transportation networks beyond the border.

What do you think? You think that you can easily grow that capacity within your organization. Is that right? The support for our legislation, which requires a stop fentanyl smuggling transportation network strategy?

Ms. KELLY. Thank you so much for the question, Ranking Member Cantwell.

And we share your keen interest in ensuring that all modalities of our transportation network are secure. That has been a particular challenge in the past and we have focused increasing efforts on ensuring that we are hitting all points through our partners at the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and securing our parcel systems, also attacking transportation on rail, via air, both passenger and cargo.

We share your interest as well in a fentanyl strategy. Certainly at the Office of National Drug Control Policy biannually we prepare the National Drug Control Strategy and our next one will be due in 2026.

But we certainly appreciate the focus that a fentanyl strategy would bring and we are happy to engage with our partners at the National Security Council and lead that effort.

Senator CANTWELL. But once we had that in your authority you could plug this into the current system and then just leverage this extra local law enforcement effort to go after these transportation networks?

Ms. KELLY. I think we would have to build out a complete plan for this, but certainly that—using the existing framework would make great sense.

Senator CANTWELL. Great. I just wanted to clarify that because I feel like you were already somewhat there. But this is about growing the capacity to target these transportation modes.

And did you want to comment anything about the technology—the vapor, how important a breakthrough that could be?

Ms. KELLY. Absolutely. I think we are very interested in ensuring that we are using leading-edge technology when and where possible.

I would also mention, though, that we want to make sure that we maintain robust support for all dimensions of interdiction, which would include ensuring that we have manpower who are trained appropriately, who are good, well equipped at detecting suspicious behavior when they pull someone over as part of a roadside interdiction, making sure that we are also funding canines.

This is a much more basic, foundational effort but in some places we are still hearing from state and local agencies that they do not have resources like that.

So I think we do want to hit it on all fronts with both the high-tech solutions but also the more nuts and bolts solutions as well.

Senator CANTWELL. Yes. You are not going to find a bigger supporter of the canines than myself. I just—talking to Sea-Tac they were, like, people walk in, they see the canines, and they turn around and leave. It is a deterrent in and of itself.

But the noninvasive technology issue is just a way to say to the bus stations, to the airports, to everybody, we are going to catch you and hopefully, you know, help us in that effort.

I wanted to ask Mr. Miller about CBP's use of safe boats, their organization in our state, but apparently those—that structure works well.

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Ranking Member Cantwell.

Yes, absolutely. The safe boats that we have, and I have visited the—where they make them for us in Bremerton multiple times.

So we have two varieties. We have a center console version that we refer to as our coastal interceptor vessel. It is 40 feet. It is custom designed specifically for our needs. And then we have a closed cabin version called the all-weather interceptor that is—that we use in more of our cold weather locations.

Both of them have been game changers in our fleet. We used to—you know, legacy customs we used go-fast vessels that we basically turned into law enforcement vessels.

But these are the first ones that are custom tailored for law enforcement.

Senator CANTWELL. But these are helping us on our waterways detect the smuggling on our waterways?

Mr. MILLER. Absolutely. Absolutely.

They are—we have recently repowered them. We are doing other modifications to make them safer for our agents during high-risk pursuits and boardings.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you.

And I will have something for the record for the Rear Admiral to talk about on that, but very much support the Coast Guard, increasing capacity for them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BUDD [presiding]. Thank you, Senator Cantwell.

Admiral, you mentioned in your testimony that the Coast Guard is using small unmanned aircraft as part of the combined force package for drug interdiction.

Could you tell me what sort of unmanned vehicles the Coast Guard is deploying in its drug interdiction mission and are there any other UAS platforms that the Coast Guard is looking to deploy but not currently using?

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Good afternoon, Senator.

So I do not use the term game changer a lot but when we started employing the ScanEagle unmanned aircraft on the national security cutters it did change the game for us.

The way that we pursue drug smugglers on the high seas is with a package of a cutter with a helicopter that can shoot out the engines and then a maritime patrol aircraft that is overhead to find them and then cue the cutter to get after that with its small boat.

When you have an unmanned aircraft and you can launch that from the flight deck of the cutter and put that up there then you do not have to rely on scarce, long-range aircraft from either CBP or Coast Guard or other agencies. So it is, indeed, a game changer.

Senator BUDD. Is that fuel or is that electric or what type of propulsion?

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Sir, I would have to get to the actual specs on it.

Senator BUDD. Yes. No worries.

I will continue with you, Admiral. The Aviation Logistics Center at Elizabeth City, North Carolina, my home state, is the central hub of the Coast Guard's aviation program.

In addition to conducting heavy maintenance on the existing fleet the ALC is also instrumental in the fleet's transition to both the C-130J and the MH-60. As the Coast Guard expands its drug and alien migrant interdiction measures, are there additional needs in the Coast Guard aviation fleet or at the ALC specifically that this committee should be thinking of?

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Yes, Senator, and thank you for your support of the Aviation Logistics Center. The work that they are doing there to missionize new aircraft and then to do the depot maintenance on our 60 aircraft to get them up and flying for longer as part of their service life extension program is absolutely critical to the organization.

Sir, the bigger answer is we need more aircraft. We are constrained by the resources that we have, both the fixed wing like the C-130Js and, moving forward, we are going to need to figure out a way to get more rotary aircraft to deploy on both our cutters to get after drug smugglers and also for shore-based missions.

We need to raise our top line. Sir, we have been saying for a while now that we are a \$20 billion Coast Guard on a \$12 billion budget, and those sort of top line increases will help us get after aviation and everything else that we need.

Senator BUDD. Thank you very much.

Mr. Miller, your testimony mentions a November 2022 incident in which three Air and Marine Operations—marine were interdiction agents were shot, one tragically being killed.

You also reported that AMO enforcement resulted in the seizure of more than 1,500 weapons in Fiscal Year 2024. Does your office have any record as to how often AMO agents are subjected to incoming fire while carrying out their missions?

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Senator.

Yes, the event in 2022 when Mike was killed was tragic and a game changer for Air Marine Operations. We have seen an increase in violence in noncompliant boardings and we have changed our training significantly.

We have outfitted—I mentioned we have outfitted our vessels differently with different safety equipment and armament. We have also equipped our agents differently as well.

So I think you will see the most capable air marine agents to date.

Senator BUDD. Thank you very much.

Continue on. Mr. Kelly [sic], your testimony mentions your work with the interdiction committee to continue drug interdiction efforts across the Federal Government.

The DOD has several members on the interdiction committee but do you think more direct engagement from the DOD along the southern border would be helpful in stopping the flow of illegal immigration and illicit drugs, particularly now that President Trump has designated many of the cartels as foreign terrorist organizations?

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Senator.

We work very closely with DOD right now, NORTHCOM, JTF-North, and we are coordinating with them currently on any kind of additional force lay down that may come to the Southwest border, and we welcome any assistance in that effort.

Senator BUDD. Thank you very much.

Senator Kim, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ANDY KIM,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY**

Senator KIM. Thank you.

I appreciate all of you coming on out and talking with us.

Director Kelly, I think I would like to start with you. You know, I think all of us here recognize we want to have a comprehensive approach to this. You know, that includes some of these efforts, go after the cartels on immigration.

But there was also a statistic that I come across, and I guess I just wanted to ask you if this was correct. I saw a statistic that came across saying that U.S. citizens made up 80 percent of individuals with fentanyl seized at ports of entry and I wanted to just ask you, does that sound correct to you, roughly?

Ms. KELLY. I would certainly defer to our partners at DHS which would be the source of that statistic. But yes, it sounds generally correct.

Senator KIM. I guess I wanted to ask and, you know, to whatever extent you know, Mr. Miller, you want to jump in as well. But do we have an understanding of who these Americans are, you know, in terms of affiliation with, you know, criminal operations or other things of that nature?

Mr. Miller, I want to just check with you if you have thoughts here.

Mr. MILLER. Yes. Thank you, Senator.

So I would definitely say that the cartels are running all the narcotics operations on the Southwest border and then they will utilize anyone that they can support.

Senator KIM. So they are recruiting Americans to help this get across the border. Is that what you believe is happening?

Mr. MILLER. I have no doubt of that, Senator.

Senator KIM. OK. I am just thinking through this in terms of just what are the different ways we can sort of disrupt this operation and kind of engage and understand, you know, how that recruitment might be occurring—you know, other types of ways in which we can engage.

Director Kelly, you know, you talked about the leading edge tech that is a component of that and you also mentioned a number of other aspects that are important when it comes to interdiction.

But on the leading edge tech, I guess I wanted to just ask you, you know, as I am trying to explain to, you know, the people in New Jersey what way we should be putting our priorities.

You know, I have certainly heard a lot about scanning technologies but what are the other types of technology that is proven to be best practices and where are we at in terms of scaling that to the level that we would need?

Ms. KELLY. Thank you so much, Senator Kim, for the question.

I think we have two dimensions that we have to consider in responding to that. Part of it is developing the technology and the other part is making sure that it can be deployed to all of the partners that we need.

We recognize that we are relying in large part here on the work of our 18,000 sheriffs' offices and police departments across the country, and so for them this leading edge tech even if we have it may never be within reach.

So we have to be thinking about what makes sense in terms of broad scale investment and then how much of that can be actually in the hands of state and local officers.

So on the first point, I think I would defer to our experts here from the actual border—from CBP, who I know leads a lot of the technological development for the Southwest border and also for the maritime space.

What I think we might want to be thinking about when we are talking about state and local deployment, though, may be sort of second generation technology where we are thinking about handheld scanners, we are thinking about ensuring that they are trained so that they can properly question drivers in roadside stops so that they are not taking the personal risk—you know, if you are

thinking about state patrol officers, about pulling over a tractor trailer with a hidden compartment and thinking about delaying the schedule of commerce in the United States.

So I think it is a broad range, depending on whether you are talking about the Federal investment directly or whether we are talking about something that is deployable to state and locals.

Senator KIM. And I appreciated earlier that you also just raised the importance of just ensuring that we have enough canine investment as well.

So, you know, I think so often here in Congress we get caught up on just the tech but remembering that it is the manpower as well as, you know, some of these other types of tools.

Mr. Miller, I just wanted to turn it over to you if you have anything further here. Just help us understand, like, you know, where should we be when it comes to this leading edge tech and where do you think we are at right now? I want to just understand your understanding of the delta.

Mr. MILLER. Yes. Thank you, Senator.

As the assistant director mentioned, at the ports of entry technology is vital for sure. I would say in between the ports of entry I think any kind of technology that assists in domain awareness is critical, whether that is our use of radars, aerostats, cameras, our use of artificial intelligence or machine learning.

Another critical gap that CBP has that we are working through and trying to catch up with is the counter UAS threat.

So, you know, there is—that is a threat along the border. That is a threat to our agents, whether it is surveillance of our operations from the south side of the border, flying contraband in small loads across the border.

We have seen what the cartels do to each other using small drones, dropping explosives, and then, of course, with AMO collision of risk with aircraft.

So, you know, legacy Customs radars along the border were historically meant to detect general aviation aircraft and ultra lights, and not a meter or less size targets operating extremely low or slow.

So we are catching up with that technology, deploying tools that can detect and mitigate this new emerging threat.

Senator KIM. Thank you. I yield back.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Senator Kim.

Senator Fischer.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DEB FISCHER,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEBRASKA**

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Senator Budd.

Ms. Kelly, I think a key step in addressing the illicit drug threat is ensuring the existing programs within the government are working.

As you know, the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas program known as HIDTA is a cornerstone of how we combat regional drug trafficking throughout the United States, and I have seen firsthand in my state of Nebraska, especially for law enforcement in rural areas with fewer local resources, how important this is.

For example, HIDTA is the primary resource for the winged task force that covers 11 of our Panhandle counties. Through HIDTA the task force has developed a uniquely cooperative investigative program which is helping western Nebraska law enforcement more actively manage narcotic and criminal investigations.

In your view, how would you evaluate HIDTA's effectiveness nationwide?

Ms. KELLY. Thank you so much, Senator Fischer, for your support and for the question.

Nationwide we are extremely proud of the work that HIDTAs are doing. One of the things that we often tout is that for every dollar invested in the HIDTA program the rate of return is \$63 which is a pretty phenomenal testament to the success of the program overall.

In 2023 HIDTAs collectively disrupted or dismantled more than 3,000 drug trafficking organizations or money laundering organizations, and collectively they seized more than 2,000 metric tons of drugs, which I think also completes the narrative here.

Often when we are talking about drug interdiction we have a tendency to focus on the ports of entry and at the borders, which is critical to our overall success.

But we often like to point to the work of the HIDTAs interdicting drugs within the interior of the United States and I think the success rate there is phenomenal as well.

Senator FISCHER. What challenges do you see or that you possibly anticipate in the future in meeting your goals that you have out there?

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Senator, for asking that question.

We do face myriad challenges. In some communities the focus on drug trafficking is often subordinate to other threats, which is certainly a challenge in terms of making sure that there are state and local resources to put on HIDTA task forces.

I would also say fatigue is a huge element for us and I think it is why the focus on border security and interdiction at the ports of entry and at the borders is key because I think we are asking an awful lot of our state and local task force officers when they are being asked to interdict drugs that did evade the borders and when they are being asked to investigate the types of networks that are directly linked to cartels.

That is a huge challenge. It is a training challenge and it is a resource challenge for all of our task forces.

Senator FISCHER. You know, you brought up the border and, obviously, that southern border is a major disruption zone. In years past we have struggled with all the different agencies out there using different intel, using different maps, whether it is DEA or FBI or CBP or the Department of Defense as well.

I think we have to have a shared map government wide, a shared map to identify the threats that we have. In your testimony you noted efforts by the Drug Enforcement Administration to map out this data comprehensively.

Can you speak about that further, please?

Ms. KELLY. Thank you so much for that question, Senator Fischer.



I agree. I think we all agree that a common operating picture is imperative, and a big challenge for us too is making sure that we are in a place where we can share information freely from the IC all the way down to our state and local partners.

This is where we really rely on the work of our Federal agencies to be the bridge so that, as you say, the map—the common operating picture can be not just conceived but then communicated from top to bottom.

Senator FISCHER. And how do we achieve that?

Ms. KELLY. How we achieve that is a work in progress. It is—I will not lie, it is a challenge. It is a challenge both in terms of the security levels but it is also a challenge in terms of culture and promoting information sharing.

We are talking about people who are accustomed to building trust with each other as people to share information and sometimes when we are working cross-community like that we have to figure out not just one bridge but multiple ways to bridge that gap.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Senator Budd.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Senator Fischer.

Senator Luján.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BEN RAY LUJÁN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW MEXICO**

Senator LUJÁN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Fentanyl is devastating communities across the country and stopping it at the border is critical. Advanced technology is one of our strongest tools in this fight.

Most fentanyl enters land—the United States through land ports of entry, which is why I have advocated for getting 100 percent screening using nonintrusive inspection technology, NII.

Now, NII has helped CBP intercept massive amounts of fentanyl in cargo and vehicles, over 200,000 pounds in the last 3 years.

While I know it is outside the jurisdiction of this committee we need to further invest in these technologies to save lives, strengthen border security and ensure law enforcement has the tools they need to fight the fentanyl crisis.

Now, Mr. Miller, your testimony states that the Air and Maritime Operations, AMO, has integrated artificial intelligence into its systems to help detect illicit activity but that cartels appear to still be exploiting gaps in our enforcement capabilities to evade detection and find ways to move fentanyl through our waters.

AI has the potential to revolutionize interdiction by identifying smuggling patterns and improving real-time threat detection.

What is AMO doing to fully leverage AI and next-generation technology to stop traffickers before drugs reach our communities?

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Senator.

Yes. So AI has changed the game when you are—for example, if you are—some of our radars when they are tracking targets in the maritime approaches some of the areas that are more remote just a mere presence in an area is suspicious.

Other areas such as the Florida straits, especially approaches going into Miami or Fort Lauderdale where you have such a high concentration of recreational vessels you need to have something

else to assist in filtering nefarious from recreational, and that is where we use AI machine learning, building algorithms that can identify patterns to point out or at least lessen the clutter of the sheer volumes of targets on the radar.

Senator LUJÁN. And what partnerships exist between CBP and entities like DEA, FBI, and DOD to enhance intelligence sharing and leverage advanced detection to technologies already deployed?

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Senator.

Yes. Like Assistant Director Kelly mentioned, I think—I do not think we have ever had a better common operational picture with the partners with the capabilities that we have.

We have our Air Marine Operations center, for example, in Riverside, California that can ingest all of the radar feeds or individual camera feeds or even pictures that agents are taking on their cameras, and then share that with a community where you literally have a single pane of glass of partners working together.

Senator LUJÁN. Just last year the commander for the U.S. Northern Command told another Senate committee that as many as 1,000 unmanned drones cross the U.S. southern border every month.

As I mentioned earlier, DEA data also indicates that most shipments of fentanyl come across the border through land ports of entry.

Yes or no, is the threat coming from the air and our land ports of entry?

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Senator.

You know, as was mentioned earlier, we really do not know because we are catching such a small percentage. I will tell you that the vast majority of seizures are coming through the land ports. We have not seen fentanyl being smuggled in drone crossings along the border but that certainly does not mean that it is not happening.

Senator LUJÁN. Do you know what percentage of vehicles—passenger vehicles are screened that enter the United States through the southern border?

Mr. MILLER. Senator, I do not. I would defer to my partners with the office field operations.

Senator LUJÁN. I appreciate that.

I can submit that a little bit later. I know that it is not 100 percent and I do not even think it is 50 percent. Back in 2008–2009 it was, like, 5 percent or something, some ridiculously small number.

So if 90 percent of the fentanyl that the U.S. is interdicting at the southern border is being done in passenger vehicles entering the United States and we still randomly look at cars and we are still screening a very small percentage of them, again, 100 percent screening of inbound and outbound passenger vehicles and, I would argue, cargo.

And I would point to the water ports as well—that there is much more we could be doing with modernizing water ports of entry. I am reminded of a report that came out from the Department of Homeland Security, I believe, under both President Trump's first term and President Biden's term as well that suggested that there were precursor chemicals that were being intercepted—stolen—

after they would get on land—off the ship, on land, and then they would be taken to the screening facility.

Between the water port and the screening facility they were getting stolen and then they were being driven to Mexico and they were coming back to the United States with fentanyl. How in the world is that happening?

Hundred percent screening. Stopping what is happening in these cargo containers I believe will make a big difference.

Now, I have several other questions. My time has already run out here. I will submit them into the record. I appreciate this important hearing and I certainly hope that there is some ways that we can get some of this adopted into good policy and get it funded and make sure you have the tools you need.

Thank you for the time, Mr. Chairman.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Klobuchar.

**STATEMENT OF HON. AMY KLOBUCHAR,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM MINNESOTA**

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you, and thank you, all of you, for your work. I have been going back and forth between Agriculture and Judiciary but I wanted to be here at least for the tail end of this because we have had a lot of issues with fentanyl in our state.

I have worked a lot on the social media side of it with a number of other senators to try to cut down on that. As we know, a lot of kids especially are purchasing pills that way but we also stop—need to stop these illicit drugs and fake pills from entering our borders in the first place. I thank you for your work.

Director Kelly, your written testimony referenced the government's efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking through the mail including the 3,800 pounds of fentanyl seized by the Postal Inspection Service.

I lead bipartisan legislation known as the STOP Act 2.0 which builds on the original STOP Act that Senator Portman and I did that was enacted by President Trump in 2018.

Can I count on ONDCP's support as we work to build on legislation to crack down on fentanyl through the mail?

Ms. KELLY. Senator Klobuchar, thank you so much for the question.

We absolutely agree that stopping the flow of fentanyl through the U.S. mail is key and we rely heavily on our partners from the U.S. Postal Inspection Service to do that work.

And we would also add that fentanyl flow through express consignment carriers, private industry partners like UPS, FedEx, and DHL is equally key.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Very good. Also, I just want to note I know that Senator Blackburn asked you about the HIDTA program and it is very important in our state to our counter narcotics efforts. So I appreciate that.

I used to be a prosecutor and know—coordination how important it is. So I wanted to add to that.

Rear Admiral, I know that Coast Guard plays a major role here and we love the Coast Guard in Minnesota. We especially love ice breakers up on Lake Superior.

But could you talk about what you would need in terms of Coast Guard cutters to bring down the cocaine that we are getting in?

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Good afternoon, Senator.

Yes, ma'am. In short, we need more of them. We are currently building new offshore patrol cutters. We are finishing up the program for the fast response cutters. We are still running our older ships.

Ten years ago I was a commanding officer of a cutter that was almost 50 years old then and we are still operating it today.

We have trouble getting parts for those ships and when we have a scheduled maintenance period like a dry dock we do not even have the funding to be able to take that ship and make sure it can continue to operate.

I mentioned in my opener we had a ship with a hole in the side of it with water rushing in last week and that ship was built in the 1980s. So we are running these old ships——

Senator KLOBUCHAR. You mean, like, when Cabbage Patch dolls and Walkmen were popular with everyone?

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Yes, ma'am. I remember that.

And yes, ma'am, those are the ships that we are using and we need new ships and new aircraft to replace those so we can get after today's threats.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. OK. Thank you.

Could you talk about how working cooperatively with our allies strengthens American law enforcement and national security interests?

I just always think I am not going to go out to some of the issues we are having right now with our allies but I think people do not realize sometimes the law enforcement coordination that goes on. Could you talk about that?

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Yes, Senator.

I think people probably do not realize that right now we have a Dutch ship patrolling in the Caribbean with a U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement detachment on board and just in the last 2 weeks they have had two drug interdictions of cocaine, and we are able to prosecute those cases because we had a U.S. law enforcement detachment make that interdiction.

So the U.S. attorney will take the case. We can hold those people accountable but more importantly we can get the intelligence from that case, use that to feed the intel cycle, and then figure out how to dismantle the cartels because of it.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. OK. Very good. I am going to end a little early in deference to my colleagues.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Senator Klobuchar.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. So thank you.

Senator BUDD. Senator Rosen, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JACKY ROSEN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEVADA**

Senator ROSEN. Well, thank you, Chair Budd, and thank you, Senator Klobuchar, for giving me a little bit more of your time.

Anyway, thank you to our witnesses for being here today. It is a really important hearing, and I want to talk about the impact of the current administration's actions on your ability to do your job.

So, Ms. Kelly, I do not need to tell you or any other members of this committee how vital the work that you do at HIDTA, or I am going to just say what we usually call it, HIDTA—how important that program is.

In Nevada, we have two High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas, and according to the Southern Nevada Health District between 2022—2020 excuse me—and 2023 the number of fentanyl overdoses among residents of Clark County, our state's largest county, increased by 97 percent. That is why programs like HIDTA are needed now more than ever, and I have strongly supported their annual appropriation.

Unfortunately, according to several reports and lawsuits filed by state attorneys generals, both the OMB hiring freeze and the subsequent pausing and reallocation of resources have impacted funding for the HIDTA program.

So, Ms. Kelly, can you talk about how these actions have impacted the work that you do, your ability to stop the drugs from coming?

Are you currently receiving the necessary support and funding to carry out your crucial work?

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Senator Rosen, for the question, and especially for your support for the HIDTA program. We deeply appreciate it.

Happily for us, the funding freeze that our grant program was subject to was fairly short lived. It was rescinded within about 4 hours. So we were in a position that we had to pause but it was a very brief pause and we are happy that the HIDTAs are back and running as usual.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you. I am going to move on.

I know Senator Klobuchar talked a little bit about international cooperation—of course, Minnesota on the Canadian border there.

But I want to talk about SOUTHCOM because I sit on Armed Services Committee and in our hearing with SOUTHCOM Commander Richardson the general spoke about our Armed Forces' success in detecting and seizing maritime drug shipments, including the importance of working with partner nations to increase our drug seizures.

So, Admiral Chamie, how can we work together and leverage our international partners, not just with Canada, but to improve the detection of precursor chemicals and allowing us to shift our interdiction efforts earlier in the fentanyl production process? How can we best equip the Coast Guard to do that?

Rear Admiral CHAMIE. Good afternoon, Senator.

So with SOUTHCOM they have a component command in Florida and Key West called the Joint Interagency Task Force South and it performs the DOD's detection and monitoring function.

Basically, helps get the intel and tells Coast Guard and other allied partners where we should be patrolling and where we can focus.

Under the Indo-Pacific region the INDOPACOM has a component for the Joint Interagency Task Force West. They do similar functions over there to focus on the larger ships that might be bringing fentanyl precursors into the United States and in fact just not too long ago they worked and had an interdiction of a commer-

cial vessel bringing precursors—fentanyl precursors—into Mexico and they were able to work with Mexico to seize those precursors when they entered port.

Those type of international relationships and working with both components for INDOPACOM and SOUTHCOM are critical to us.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you. I appreciate your work there.

In the last minute or so I have left I want to talk a little bit about our borders and the nonintrusive scanners that we can use because last year during a hearing on DHS Fiscal Year 2025 budget it was mentioned how critical it was for funding to be included for the installation of the new nonintrusive scanner technologies like the low energy portal, LEP, scanning systems that stop the flow of fentanyl into the United States through land ports of entries, which is, of course, I think some of the most common ways that fentanyl are smuggled across the border into our country.

It was also discussed at the time that a number of high-tech scanners that have been provided to CBP officers to identify and stop fentanyl were sitting unused in warehouses.

So, Mr. Miller, are similar scanners being used at maritime ports of entry? If so, are they operational? If not, is there a way for us to adapt this technology and use every tool in the toolbox to stop these deadly drugs from coming in, and tell us what you might need, please.

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Senator.

I would defer that to the experts that use that technology in Customs and Border Protection and the Office of Field Operations.

I will tell you that is—that nonintrusive inspection technology is part of the multi-layered enforcement strategy at our borders and to include our ports.

The X-ray, gamma ray, and other kind of sensing technologies is invaluable in discovering smuggled items. They also have mobile systems as well that they will bring along to some of the MSSEs that we participate and provide security with as well—Super Bowls, events in the NCR, et cetera.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you.

I think it is really important that we use all of these, and then I would just want to add that when we do think about adding these new technologies we need to add improved Wi-Fi, different kinds of space. Make sure that all the surrounding infrastructure is there for these capabilities.

So thank you for allowing me to go over my time, Senator.

Senator BUDD. Thank you, Senator Rosen.

And, again, I thank each of you all as part of the panel today.

You know, Mr. Miller in our dialog earlier we used acronyms like AMO and incidents, and you referred to Mike having lost his life. So, again, we are thankful for him, for his service, and we are thankful to his family as well.

This is a dangerous business you all are in and we are grateful for each and every one of you.

Senators will have until close of business on Wednesday, March 5 to submit questions for the record. The witnesses will have until the end of the day on Wednesday, March 19 to respond to those questions.

This concludes today's hearing. The Committee stands adjourned.  
[Whereupon, at 1:18 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]





## A P P E N D I X

### RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. TED CRUZ TO SHANNON KELLY

*Question 1.* As the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator, you are responsible for coordinating interagency efforts to interdict illicit drugs from entering the United States. What are some of the ways you work with the U.S. Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, and other “boots on the ground” enforcement agencies to combat illicit drug trafficking?

Answer. The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC) plays a crucial role in synchronizing efforts among agencies, such as the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to combat illicit drug trafficking. The USIC’s collaborative efforts include the following:

- Expert Policy Advisor for the President: As designated by the Director of Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC) advises the White House on executive policy that facilitates communication and cooperation among Federal agencies involved in drug interdiction, including the Coast Guard and CBP. This ensures that resources and intelligence are shared effectively to maximize both interdictions and criminal investigations that degrade drug trafficking organizations.
- Strategic Planning: The USIC authors applicable portions of the *National Drug Control Strategy*; national border strategies for the Southwest, Northern, and Caribbean Borders; and the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan (NICCP). These documents guide the operational activities of the interdiction community, including the Coast Guard and CBP.
- Interagency Coordination: Working within the framework of The Interdiction Committee (TIC), the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC) oversees government-wide efforts to integrate intelligence, detection, monitoring, and law enforcement to maximize the impact of U.S. and partner interdiction efforts. Consisting of the senior executive leadership from its 28 member organizations, The Interdiction Committee (TIC) serves as an empowered and collaborative interagency problem-solving body that resolves issues related to the coordination, oversight, and integration of international, border, and domestic drug interdiction efforts.
- Budget oversight: The U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC) helps align the drug enforcement agencies’ efforts with overall national interdiction priorities. The U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC) reviews the National Drug Control Budget for 19 Federal departments and agencies to ensure that they have the necessary resources and support to carry out their interdiction functions efficiently and effectively, and in accordance with the President’s priorities. When needed, the U.S. Interdiction Coordinator (USIC) works to help resolve issues that arise during the coordination of interdiction efforts.

*Question 2.* What is the impact of the interagency working together to address drug trafficking? What results are we seeing from this “whole-of-government” approach?

Answer. The “whole-of-government” approach to combating drug trafficking has a significant impact on drug supply. This collaborative approach among federal, state, local, Tribal, territorial, and international partners create a multi-layered defense against drug trafficking, addressing it from multiple angles. Data regarding seizures of drugs like fentanyl, cocaine, and methamphetamine highlight the results of these interagency efforts. Beyond drug interdiction, the investigative successes of task forces that integrate federal, state, local, Tribal and territorial law enforcement are key to dismantling criminal networks that produce and traffic illegal drugs. While progress is being made, drug production and trafficking remain a complex and evolving challenge as new drug types and smuggling methods continuously evolve. Regular adaptation and uninterrupted collaboration are essential to maintaining

and improving the effectiveness of the whole-of-government approach. Impacts and results of the whole of government approach include the following:

- **Enhanced Intelligence Sharing:** Interagency collaboration facilitates the pooling of intelligence from various sources, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of drug trafficking networks. This allows for more targeted and effective interdiction efforts. Information sharing is vital at all levels of interagency cooperation, with two examples being the Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special Operations Division, and the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTAs) Investigative Support Centers.
- **Increased Interdiction Effectiveness:** By coordinating resources and operations, agencies like the Coast Guard, CBP, DEA, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) can disrupt drug trafficking at multiple points, from source to distribution. This results in significant seizures of illicit drugs. An example of this is the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-South), which synthesizes intelligence and operational assets to maximize the ability to interdict United States-bound drugs in international waters.
- **Dismantling Criminal Networks:** Task forces like the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) and HIDTA initiatives focus on dismantling entire drug trafficking organizations (DTOs), rather than just seizing individual drug shipments. This has a more long-term impact on reducing the flow of drugs.
- **Financial Disruption:** Agencies like the Treasury Department work to disrupt the financial networks that support drug trafficking, targeting money laundering, and other financial crimes.
- **Improved International Cooperation:** Interagency collaboration extends to international partnerships, allowing for coordinated efforts to combat drug trafficking across borders.

*Question 3.* A critical aspect of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Program is assistance to federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement entities. What work is the HIDTA program doing in the West Texas, South Texas, Houston and Texoma HIDTAs to disrupt the market for illegal drugs?

*Answer.* The High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Programs in West Texas, South Texas, Houston, and Texoma play a critical role in disrupting the illegal drug market by leveraging multi-agency task forces, intelligence-driven operations, and robust information sharing. Each High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) tailors its approach to regional threats, focusing on interdiction, financial disruption, training, and overdose prevention to dismantle DTOs and disrupt the market for illicit drugs. All of these regional High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) HIDTAs employ data-driven investigations, enforcement, and interagency collaboration to combat drug trafficking, removing billions of dollars in illegal drugs and assets from criminal organizations.

**West Texas HIDTA:** West Texas HIDTA encompasses 520 miles of the United States' border with Mexico and combats drug trafficking along major smuggling corridors. It collaborates with 13 federal, four state, 15 local, and one Tribal agency to target DTOs transporting fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine into, and throughout the United States. Examples of success include the following:<sup>1</sup>

- disrupted/dismantled 50 drug trafficking/money laundering organizations, 29 of which were international;
- seized 74 kilograms of fentanyl, 1,717 kilograms of methamphetamine, and 971 kilograms of cocaine; and
- seized cash and other assets valued at \$2.3 million.

**South Texas HIDTA:** South Texas HIDTA addresses cross-border smuggling networks, leveraging 244 agency partnerships to combat DTOs and money laundering organizations (MLOs). It also leverages intelligence sharing, local prevention efforts, and training to aid collaboration and address the needs of partner agencies and local communities. Examples of success include the following:

- disrupted/dismantled 108 drug trafficking/money laundering organizations, 64 of which were international;

<sup>1</sup> Accomplishments for each of the HIDTAs are from program year 2023, the most complete dataset currently available. Data for program year 2024 will be available later this Spring.

- seized 82 kilograms of fentanyl, 7,936.8 kilograms of methamphetamine, and 5,306.2 kilograms of cocaine; and
- seized cash and other assets valued at \$30.9 million.

Houston HIDTA: Situated in a national trafficking hub, the Houston HIDTA targets DTOs involved in drug distribution, weapons trafficking, and gang-related violence. The HIDTA supports a range of enforcement initiatives, including the HIDTA License Plate Reader (LPR) Platform. Examples of success include the following:

- disrupted/dismantled 127 drug trafficking/money laundering organizations, 60 of which were international;
- seized 86.5 kilograms of fentanyl, 8,512 kilograms of methamphetamine, and 2,519 kilograms of cocaine; and
- seized cash and other assets valued at \$39.5 million.

Texoma HIDTA: Texoma HIDTA spans North Texas and Oklahoma, combating DTOs and MLOs through 28 task forces and financial crime investigations. The HIDTA plays a key role in inland seizures, overdose reductions, and training. Examples of success include the following:

- disrupted/dismantled 74 drug trafficking/money laundering organizations, 21 of which were international;
- seized 147.1 kilograms of fentanyl, 2,221.5 kilograms of methamphetamine, and 432.5 kilograms of cocaine; and
- seized cash and other assets valued at \$16.2 million.

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RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. DAN SULLIVAN TO  
SHANNON KELLY

*Question 1.* Alaska's lack of infrastructure and remote communities make interdiction efforts more challenging. What specific steps is HIDTA taking to disrupt drug trafficking in isolated areas where law enforcement presence is limited?

Answer. The Alaska HIDTA is addressing the state's remote geography and limited infrastructure by employing intelligence-driven operations, targeted interdiction, and enhanced coordination. Through these efforts, HIDTA is effectively disrupting DTOs despite Alaska's logistical challenges, reducing drug flow into the state's most vulnerable areas. Key initiatives include the following:

- Targeted Task Forces in Remote Areas: HIDTA supports multiple task forces, including Southeast Alaska Cities Against Drugs Task Force (SEACAD) in Juneau, Fairbanks Area-wide Narcotics Task Force (FANT) in Fairbanks, and Southcentral Area-wide Narcotics Task Force (SCAN) covering Anchorage, Wasilla, Kenai, and Kodiak, which focus on trafficking routes in isolated regions.
- Intelligence-Driven Enforcement: The Alaska HIDTA Intelligence Support Center (ISC), co-located with the state's fusion center, provides real-time analysis and deconfliction, allowing law enforcement to effectively track and dismantle DTOs, even in remote areas.
- Air and Marine Interdiction: HIDTA partners with Federal and local agencies to monitor trafficking via air travel and marine routes, increasing surveillance and investigations at the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport and addressing vulnerabilities in the Alaska Marine Highway System (to include maritime traffic).
- Disrupting Financial Networks: Given Alaska's high drug prices, DTOs profit significantly from trafficking. HIDTA targets their money laundering operations to disrupt financial incentives.
- Fentanyl-Specific Efforts: With fentanyl as Alaska's primary drug threat, HIDTA-supported task forces seized 18 kilograms of fentanyl and nearly 600,000 fentanyl pills in 2023, focusing on stopping synthetic opioids from reaching rural areas.
- Local Law Enforcement Support: HIDTA funds training and intelligence-sharing for law enforcement in isolated communities, strengthening their ability to detect and intercept illicit shipments.

*Question 2.* What more needs to be done to help combat this issue? Specifically, how can HIDTA better bring together local law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organizations to deter, detect, and interdict the movement of illegal narcotics in Alaska through the air and postal systems?

Answer. The Alaska HIDTA serves as a primary coordinator of federal, state, local, Tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies in the state of Alaska to deter, detect, and interdict illicit narcotics. Because interstate and local drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) primarily transport illicit drugs into the region through parcels and commercial air carriers, the HIDTA has targeted initiatives, such as Southcentral Area-wide Narcotics (SCAN) Task Force, to conduct passenger and parcel interdiction operations at the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport. The Alaska HIDTA also ensures information is shared across all levels of law enforcement through its multiagency Investigative Support Center (ISC). The HIDTA has identified a need for continued monitoring and intelligence gather to identify connections between DTOs operating in the region and international criminal organizations, including Mexican cartels. This will require continuing close collaboration with law enforcement partners at all levels in Alaska and the contiguous United States as well as ensuring Federal partners, such as the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, are equipped with the necessary investigative tools to address the unique challenges related to illicit smuggling via international and domestic parcels.

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RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO TO SHANNON KELLY

*Question 1.* Ms. Kelly, you mentioned in your opening statement that while we are facing the worst narcotics crisis in our history there is a silver lining in the C-D-C's latest data showing a provisional decrease of 23.7 percent in overdose deaths from September 2023 to September 2024. What detection and seizure factors do you think are responsible for this positive development?

Answer. The United States protects its borders through a combination of intelligence, law enforcement, technology, and infrastructure. This multi-layered system includes diplomatic work with countries that produce or act as transshipment points for illegal drugs, detection of traffickers approaching the borders, infrastructure along the borders and at ports of entry, and through a robust system of cooperating law enforcement agencies within the United States. All of this is underpinned by intelligence capabilities and professionals who support all phases of border protection. Key to our investment is the United States' incredible workforce of selfless men and women who put their lives on the line to keep America safe. The United States' interdiction forces reduce the drug supply, having multiple impacts to the country's citizens. First, drug interdiction removes dangerous drugs from the supply chain, preventing countless lethal doses of these drugs from being available for Americans to use. Moreover, interdictions provide the basis of investigations of dangerous criminal gangs and international drug producers, allowing the United States to degrade and eliminate the networks that threaten the general public.

At the border, CBP employs a layered approach that includes sophisticated targeting based on advance cargo and traveler data, canine units, x-ray and other detection devices, including frontline officers and agents. ONDCP defers to CBP on the specifics of their programs, on non-invasive or intrusive scanners at ports of entry, to increase scanning capabilities. CBP collaborates with industry and other government components on enhanced technologies and is continually scouting new technologies based on the capability gaps identified in the respective environments.

In addition, within the United States, there are more than 18,000 police departments that enforce infractions of drug laws. Programs such as HIDTA and OCDETF bring these entities together to work across jurisdictions so law enforcement can organize their efforts to degrade and destroy the most dangerous criminal networks.

*Question 2.* Ms. Kelly, technology plays a major role in our efforts to effectively intercept narcotics. You mentioned that AI could be a useful tool going forward. Is the Office of National Drug Control Policy using AI already or is it actively looking into ways to use AI?

Answer. Development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools is imperative to overcome the challenges in disrupting the supply chain and interdiction of narcotics like fentanyl and other synthetic opioids. Not only will AI assist our laboratories and scientists in predicting the next chemical formulations of synthetics, which facilitates awareness of precursor chemicals to watch out for, it will significantly advance targeting analytics for high-risk cargo and travelers and create efficiencies in supply chains by reducing unnecessary inspections. While ONDCP defers to CBP on the specifics of their program, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, CBP initiated efforts to test AI with non-intrusive inspections production data to determine its effectiveness with NII image adjudication at the border, and testing of the AI algorithms is on-going.

Across CBP the operational use of AI is transforming the agency into a data-driven organization. CBP recognizes the importance of leveraging cutting-edge tech-

nologies, such as AI and Machine Learning (ML) to impact multiple mission areas, including the following:

- combing through data to find anomalies/items of interest in all data types;
- creating efficiencies and reducing redundancies in multiple work areas; and
- automating routine tasks performed by our personnel which allows them to focus their critical thinking skills on the important enforcement aspects of our mission.

Currently CBP's Office of Information and Technology (OIT) has implemented the enterprise AI Machine Learning Center of Excellence to lead strategic transformation, tactical mission operations excellence and innovation with data for CBP's daily mission in multiple use cases, while seeking to establish commensurate governance and ethical oversight approaches in this new, powerful technology.

Another example of AI implementation is the HSI Innovation Lab, which combines innovative technology, agile development, and industry leading design principles to reimagine HSI's current process and enhance investigative capabilities across the agency. One such capability developed by the Innovation Lab is the Repository of Analytics in a Virtualized Environment (RAVEN). RAVEN is a cloud-based tool that facilitates large, complex analytical projects to support HSI's mission including counter-TCO and counterdrug investigations. At its core, RAVEN enables HSI to analyze trends and isolate criminal patterns. HSI's use of AI through the RAVEN platform significantly enhances its ability to process, analyze, and act on vast amounts of data, thereby improving the efficiency and effectiveness of its criminal investigations, including those targeting narcotics trafficking.

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RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. TED CRUZ TO  
REAR ADM. ADAM CHAMIE

*Question 1.* Senators Cantwell, Sullivan, Baldwin, and I worked hard on the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2025, which would fix the gaps in the Coast Guard's authority to prosecute smugglers using remotely operated drug subs like the one we had in the hearing room. Please provide a summary view, from the Coast Guard's perspective, of the importance of the referenced 2025 CGAA provision for degrading transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and for holding drug smugglers accountable?

Answer. This provision would make an important change to enable the prosecution of smugglers attempting to smuggle drugs on vessels subject to United States jurisdiction regardless of whether the vessels are manned. This change supports the increased targeting of transnational criminal organizations and their evolving employment of new technologies to circumvent existing laws and is critical to the Coast Guard's ability to control the U.S. borders and maritime approaches and enforcing Federal laws.

*Question 2.* Is there anything else that is limiting your ability to catch and prosecute drug smuggling criminals?

Answer. The Coast Guard thanks the Committee for its support and inclusion of section 241 "Controlled Substances Onboard Vessels" in the Senate's "Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2025." The Coast Guard will continue to evaluate additional authorities to enhance its drug interdiction mission and will provide any such proposals as part of its annual authorization request.

*Question 3.* Maritime drug trafficking in the Middle East, including drugs trafficked on fishing dhows, has been used to finance Iran's malign activities. If the Coast Guard discovers illegal narcotics aboard a vessel in this region, what happens to the narcotics and the crew attempting to traffic them?

Answer. The Coast Guard conducts maritime operations across the Middle East for U.S. Naval Forces Central Command under Department of Defense Title 10 authorities. When illegal narcotics are discovered by Coast Guard units in this region, the drugs are seized and destroyed at sea. The crew attempting to traffic these drugs are typically released. Due to the lack of bilateral agreements with the claimed Flag state or lack of communication with certain nations, establishing jurisdiction over the people and vessels require lengthy diplomatic engagement that would hinder other U.S. Department of Defense-directed operations.

*Question 4.* Is it fair to say these would-be drug traffickers face no other punishment than having their drugs seized?

Answer. There have been instances when drug traffickers in this region have been detained by the Coast Guard for further transfer to U.S. authorities ashore. However, it is accurate to state that traffickers encountered in this region generally do

not face punishment or prosecution from the United States other than the seizure of their illicit cargo.

*Question 5.* The Coast Guard's Fiscal Year 2025 Congressional Justification states failure to achieve counterdrug performance measures was due in part to the Coast Guard's major cutters, patrol boats, and aircraft providing "primary support to Migrant Interdiction Operations (MIO)," rather than the counterdrug (CD) mission. How did the increase in illegal immigration in the last few years impact your ability to stop the drug flows elsewhere?

Answer. Coast Guard surface asset reassignment to the alien interdiction mission in District Seven to support Operation Vigilant Sentry detracted 133 major cutter days from Joint Interagency Task Force South during Fiscal Year 2024. In Fiscal Year 2023, Coast Guard surface asset and maritime patrol aircraft reassignment to Operation Vigilant Sentry detracted 432 major cutter days, 772 patrol boat days, and 404 maritime patrol aircraft hours from Joint Interagency Task Force South.

*Question 6.* In 2024, the Coast Guard interdicted over 300 thousand pounds of cocaine and other controlled substances, taking over 3 billion dollars' worth of drugs off our streets. What are the Coast Guard's drug interdiction results so far in 2025, and how does that pace compare to historical interdiction rates?

Answer. As of March 12, 2025, the Coast Guard has removed 114.5 metric tons of cocaine. The Coast Guard is on pace to remove approximately 150 metric tons of cocaine, pending resource availability and competing mission demands for the remainder of the Fiscal Year. While the Coast Guard's estimate is significantly higher than cocaine removals in Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024, 150 metric tons of cocaine removed would be considered an average year when comparing historical drug interdiction rates over the last decade.

*Question 7.* President Trump has issued several Executive Orders related to securing our borders, taking on cartels, and protecting the American people. What actions has the Coast Guard taken in response to President Trump's directives?

Answer. In response to President Trump's Executive Orders, the Coast Guard took immediate action to increase its presence along the southern border, where the President declared a national emergency, to bolster its ability to control, secure, and defend the U.S. border and its maritime approaches. Working in close coordination with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Defense, Coast Guard assets and law enforcement personnel are conducting regular patrols of the U.S. border and maritime approaches, focusing on the interdiction of illegal aliens and illicit narcotics attempting to be smuggled into the U.S. via the maritime domain. Additionally, the Coast Guard swiftly repatriates illegal aliens interdicted at sea to their country of origin and provides dedicated aircraft to assist other Departments and components in the removal of aliens who have entered or remained in the U.S. in violation of Federal law.

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RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. ROGER WICKER TO  
REAR ADM. ADAM CHAMIE

*Question 1.* The Coast Guard has suffered from a continuous lack of resources for infrastructure and equipment sustainment and modernization. This forces the Coast Guard to make investment trades that fail to provide the service adequate capabilities to conduct its critical drug interdiction missions. The Coast Guard had to reduce the safe operational limit of the MH-60 helicopter fleet, resulting in the grounding of eight of its helicopters; the service intends to divest its C-27J airplanes due to structural fatigue; and its MH-65 helicopter fleet is now more than 40 years old, well beyond its intended operational life.

With the Coast Guard's drug interdiction mission becoming ever more critical and readiness declines in both the fixed-wing and rotary-wing aviation fleets, does the Coast Guard have the aviation assets required to fulfill its drug interdiction missions?

Answer. The Coast Guard does not have the requisite aviation assets to fulfill the drug and alien migrant interdiction mission and needs congressional support for continued recapitalization of both the MH-60 and the HC-130 fleets. The Service requires an increase in the number and availability of these multi-mission air assets to execute counterdrug operations more effectively while also meeting other mission demands. More assets in the Transit Zone would allow the Service to target and interdict more traffickers.

*Question 2.* Given the decades old, and depleted rotary-wing fleet shortages, and an unscheduled reduction in fixed-wing assets, how does the Coast Guard plan to recapitalize its aviation fleets to meet the critical needs of its missions?

Answer. With the unprecedented support of the President and the continued support of this Committee, the Coast Guard will accelerate aviation recapitalization with annual appropriations and any resources provided through reconciliation. This includes extending the service life of the existing MH-60 fleet, growing both our rotary and fixed wing fleets, and investing in new capabilities like Unmanned Aerial Systems.

*Question 3.* Congress has continually highlighted the Coast Guard needs a comprehensive strategy to address aviation fleet challenges and recapitalization. To that end, Congress required a GAO study and a follow-on Coast Guard aviation strategy in the FY23 Coast Guard reauthorization.

When should we expect to see a Coast Guard aviation strategy?

Answer. As required by the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022, the Service is planning to brief Congress in April 2025.

RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO TO  
REAR ADM. ADAM CHAMIE

*Question 1.* Stopping drugs while they are moving in bulk is much easier than intercepting them at or between ports of entry. How do you work with partners to stop drugs while they are bound for the United States in vessels?

Answer. The Coast Guard is the lead Federal agency for maritime law enforcement, including drug interdiction on the high seas; we share the lead for drug interdiction in U.S. territorial seas with U.S. Customs and Border Protection. A global threat such as illicit narcotics trafficking requires the collaboration of a network of like-minded partners. The Coast Guard works closely with domestic and international partners to detect, interdict, and disrupt drug shipments before they reach the U.S. As a key member of the Joint Interagency Task Force South, the Coast Guard works in conjunction with the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Department of Defense, and other Federal agencies to share intelligence, monitor drug trafficking routes, and coordinate interdictions. The Coast Guard also deploys our Tactical Law Enforcement Teams to U.S. Navy and allied naval forces, including the UK Royal Navy, Royal Canadian Navy, and Dutch Navy, to conduct boardings from these naval forces onto suspected drug smuggling vessels. The Coast Guard coordinates with the Department of Justice and foreign legal authorities to prosecute criminals and dismantle transnational drug networks. As of March 12, 2025, the Coast Guard has removed 114.4 metric tons of cocaine in Fiscal Year 2025 and has supported the efforts of our domestic and international partners, resulting in the removal of much more. We are proud to lead maritime counterdrug efforts around the world and with Congressional support to accelerate the acquisition of new capabilities we will do so even more effectively.

*Question 2.* Are there additional tools we could give you so that operations in the source and transit zones would be more effective?

Answer. The best way to bolster the Coast Guard's counter-drug capacity is to support the growth of our Service and our ongoing fleet recapitalization and modernization efforts. This includes increasing our military workforce by at least 15,000 members, recapitalizing our surface and aviation assets, increasing unmanned systems capabilities, and investing in advanced sensors and technologies that provide our boarding teams with a tactical edge against our adversaries.

RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. TED CRUZ TO  
JONATHAN MILLER

*Question 1.* (U) In the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022, I secured a Tactical Maritime Surveillance System at Coast Guard Station South Padre Island. During my last visit to South Padre Island, I saw firsthand how this tool is being used to help secure our borders. How is CBP employing Tactical Maritime Surveillance Systems to combat drug runners, fish poachers, and human traffickers?

Answer. (FOUO//LES) The Tactical Maritime Surveillance System, callsign "Argos," is an aerostat-borne surveillance system deployed at priority U.S. maritime border locations where high numbers of drug runners, fish poachers, and migrant smugglers (some of whom may be human traffickers) are observed. While the Argos system can carry a variety of sensors, the Texas site, specifically, incorporates a maritime surface search radar, a long-range day-night camera, and an encrypted Automatic Identification System receiver. The radar can detect typical illicit vessels at ranges of 50–60 nautical miles and the camera provides visual identification out to 25 miles.

(FOUO//LES) U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations, sends all Argos sensor information from the aerostat to the Air and Marine Operations Center in Riverside, California. Two major activities occur at the Air and Marine Operations Center: 1) Detection Enforcement Officers “sort” through the identified maritime and land-based traffic in real-time, identify suspicious or illicit activity underway, alert local Federal partners of the activity, and provide updated target information (location, speed, heading, etc.) to responding law enforcement units, as requested; and 2) all Argos sensor information is processed and transported through the Minotaur mission management system, where the information is merged and correlated with other local domain awareness feeds and returned to U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Coast Guard Minotaur users, providing an unprecedented operational display of nearly all law enforcement assets and suspect threats in the region. This information is shared with all designated Federal command and control centers. As illicit activities and actors change in the region, Air and Marine Operations intends to modify technologies on the Argos platform to combat future threats.

*Question 2.* (U) CBP and the Coast Guard work closely to detect and interdict drug trafficking in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean. What role do CBP maritime patrol aircraft play in those counter-drug missions, and how do these aviation assets increase the Coast Guard’s ability to detect and interdict vessels?

Answer. (FOUO//LES) U.S. Customs and Border Protection maritime patrol aircraft provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities that detect, track, and identify targets of interest throughout the maritime environment. Targets of interest range from go-fast vessels to self-propelled semi-submersible vessels to aircraft. U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s maritime patrol aircraft are equipped with technologically advanced sensors operated by highly trained and experienced agents and officers. The role of U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s maritime patrol aircraft’s in drug interdiction operations with our Coast Guard partners is to provide them with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities and real time information to increase the Coast Guard’s domain awareness while on patrol so that their law enforcement teams can interdict vessels suspected of trafficking drugs and increase the situational awareness of the law enforcement teams during interdiction events.

*Question 3.* (U) The cartels use a wide range of methods to smuggle illicit drugs into the United States, such as drug submarines. What tactics is CBP AMO using to address these new threat vectors for drug smuggling?

Answer. (FOUO//LES) U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations manned and unmanned aircraft systems maritime patrol aircraft utilize different patrol patterns and specific sensor settings to maximize the detection of semi-submersible and surface narcotics-trafficking vessels. U.S. Customs and Border Protection manned and unmanned assets have sensor upgrades planned that will improve detection of maritime targets. Additionally, the future integration of proliferated low-earth orbit satellite connectivity will allow for greater unmanned aircraft systems maritime patrol area as well as improved information sharing capabilities in critical sections of the Eastern Pacific Ocean transit zone that are not covered by traditional geostationary satellite communications networks. This change has the potential to significantly increase the range and flexibility of U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Coast Guard interdiction assets.

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RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. ROGER WICKER TO  
JONATHAN MILLER

*Question 1.* (U) To conduct counter-drug operations and border patrol missions, CBP currently flies a fleet of around 100 helicopters as part of its Light Enforcement Platform (LEP) program. Over the past eight years, CBP has replaced about a third of the aging LEP fleet with new, modern, and technologically enhanced helicopters, however, the replacement progress has not come quickly enough for the scale of the border crisis and CBP’s needs.

Please outline how continuing this investment is critical to CBP’s drug interdiction mission.

Answer. (FOUO//LES) U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations relies on its Light Enforcement Platform as its primary workhorse in its mission to secure the Homeland while executing counter-drug operations across the United States and border enforcement missions on our borders with Canada and Mexico. As such, these aircraft are based at nearly every Air and Marine Operations facility and over half of Air and Marine Operation’s 95,000 annual flight hours are flown by crews in the Light Enforcement Platform which is comprised of 91 aircraft



with 5 variants of the Airbus Helicopters ASTAR model. The aging portion of this platform in our fleet has been hampering the full potential of Air and Marine Operations to more effectively execute missions, as compared to a revitalized fleet comprised with newer more technologically advanced platforms by a very large margin. Over two-thirds of the Light Enforcement Platform fleet has become outmoded both in mission technologies and in reliability. Air and Marine Operations has had to remove six Light Enforcement Platform aircraft from service over the last Fiscal Year due to component availability and increased cost of parts. The oldest platforms have accumulated high flight times and, due to scheduled and unscheduled maintenance requirements, have limited operational availability (*e.g.*, the B2 model (oldest) is operationally functional 40 percent of the time,<sup>1</sup> the B3 model (next oldest) is operationally functional 52 percent of the time,<sup>2</sup> and the 2B1 and B3E models are operationally functional 54 percent of the time.<sup>3</sup>) This is in direct contrast to the new H125 model delivering about 74 percent readiness rates.<sup>4</sup> Because of their chronic unavailability, these aging platforms, some of which are the oldest in operation worldwide, do not meet the needs or expectations of our Nation and proves the need for a long-overdue Light Enforcement Platform fleet revitalization.

*Question 1a.* (U) Given the mission requirements, will CBP budget for a faster fleet replacement in its FY26 budget and beyond?

Answer. (FOUO/LES) The Fiscal Year 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act funded three Light Enforcement Platform aircraft, while the Fiscal Year 2025 President's Budget requested two and a flight training device. Fiscal constraints limit U.S. Customs and Border Protection's ability to replace these aircraft at a faster rate due to competing operational requirements.

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RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO TO JONATHAN MILLER

*Question 1.* (U) Mr. Miller, I understand that at our maritime ports Customs and Border Patrol is only able to inspect less than 5 percent of containers coming in on cargo vessels. This percentage is alarmingly low given the amount of drugs being smuggled into our country.

(U) How are containers selected for screening, and do we need to inspect more containers?

Answer. (FOUO/LES) The National Threat Analysis Division within the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Office of Trade utilizes both automated, computer-based targeting and manual targeting. Automated targeting leverages specialized computer programs that are integrated with relevant trade enforcement data and sophisticated algorithms built for identifying container risks. Additionally, data and algorithms help generate enforcement profiles to support computer targeting that can place automatic holds on suspect containers. Manual targeting leverages a variety of methods to identify risk indicators of suspect cargo, which include but are not limited to reviews of entry documents and physical examinations based on local shipment data. Knowledge and experience of the reviewer are critical when identifying shipments to review, and officers have discretion determining when to carry out a container inspection. Among other U.S. Customs and Border Protection programs, the Container Security Initiative serves a notable role in increasing resilience of the global supply chain. The Container Security Initiative is a customs-to-customs partnership that addresses the threat to border security and to global trade posed by the potential for terrorist use of maritime containers to deliver a weapon. The Container Security Initiative coordinates targeting and information sharing regimens to ensure that containers that pose a potential risk for terrorism are identified and inspected at participating foreign ports before they are placed on vessels destined for the United States. The Container Security Initiative is currently operational at 68 participating seaports in 36 countries, which collectively account for approximately 67 percent of the containers destined for the United States. U.S. Customs and Border Protection has foreign-deployed teams of officers working with their host foreign government counterparts daily. While their mission is to target and to prescreen containers and to develop additional investigative leads related to

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<sup>1</sup> Average of Material Availability for AS350 B2 in Fiscal Year 2023, Fiscal Year 2024, and Fiscal Year 2025

<sup>2</sup> Average of Material Availability for AS350 B3 in Fiscal Year 2023, Fiscal Year 2024, and Fiscal Year 2025

<sup>3</sup> Average of Material Availability for AS350 2B1 and B3E in Fiscal Year 2023, Fiscal Year 2024, and Fiscal Year 2025

<sup>4</sup> Average of Material Availability for H125 in Fiscal Year 2023, Fiscal Year 2024, and Fiscal Year 2025

the terrorist threat of cargo destined for the United States, the program has evolved to address threats of mutual concern in maritime cargo as well as in other modes of transportation. These efforts have resulted in seizure of narcotics, weapons and ammunition, stolen vehicles, Intellectual Property Rights, cigarette smuggling, Anti-dumping and Countervailing Duties, and other violations.

*Question 2.* (U) Mr. Miller, in the past several years, Congress has provided sufficient funding for non-intrusive inspection equipment needed to detect the movement of opioids, methamphetamines, and other substances moving illicitly through our ports of entry.

(U) Can you tell us why this equipment, when placed in a pre-primary position, is considered a “game changer” for ports-of-entry?

Answer. (FOUO//LES) Screening higher volumes of conveyances at the Nation’s border is critical to the safety of the American public, as passenger and commercial vehicles remain the primary and secondary modes Drug Trafficking Organizations use to smuggle narcotics into the United States, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection continues to see increases in volumes of narcotics being seized.

(FOUO//LES) U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s implementation of pre-primary Non-Intrusive Inspection allows officers to examine a greater portion of traffic without impact to primary inspection times. U.S. Customs and Border Protection has implemented this by placing Non-Intrusive Inspection systems in lanes before conveyances reach the primary inspection booths, referred to as pre-primary operations. This allows a conveyance to be scanned prior to arrival at primary and transmits the image to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officer to review the Non-Intrusive Inspection image. If an anomaly is identified, the vehicle is directed to secondary inspection for further Non-Intrusive Inspection or physical examination. This model represents a change, as historically, Large-Scale systems were primarily utilized in secondary inspection, which took much longer to complete a scan.

(FOUO//LES) The Non-Intrusive Inspection program will allow U.S. Customs and Border Protection to establish mechanisms that further automate the inspection. Automation consists of enabling interoperability between Non-Intrusive Inspection systems and other enforcement tools and integration with other inspection technology. U.S. Customs and Border Protection will also employ artificial intelligence/machine learning capabilities to aid officers with timely image analysis which will further streamline the process. Ultimately, this will provide frontline personnel with tools and information that enable them to quickly and efficiently identify threats without impeding traffic flows, ensuring national security while supporting economic prosperity.

*Question 2a.* (U) Can you describe the year-by-year plan to put the recent investment in this technology to use in a smart, efficient way? When can we expect the technology to be fully deployed?

Answer. (FOUO//LES) U.S. Customs and Border Protection is currently deploying the new technology procured with appropriated funding in Fiscal Year 2018 and Fiscal Year 2019, which includes 88 Low-Energy Portals, 35 Multi-Energy Portals, and 12 High-Energy Rail systems. In addition to the 135 systems, there are 11 systems that were deployed through the DHS Science & Technology Directorate in the pilot phase. To date, U.S. Customs and Border Protection has deployed 64 systems to 27 locations.

- Fiscal Year 2021 to Fiscal Year 2022: Deployed 11 systems
- Fiscal Year 2023: Deployed 11 systems
- Fiscal Year 2024: Deployed 29 systems
- Fiscal Year 2025: Deployed 13 systems
- In Fiscal Year 2025 and 2026, U.S. Customs and Border Protection will deploy 51 systems which are currently under construction or in active construction planning phase
- An additional 31 systems require civil works funding to finalize construction plans

(FOUO//LES) U.S. Customs and Border Protection anticipates that all procured systems will be deployed by December 2026.