



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Protecting the U.S. Homeland: Fighting the Flow of Fentanyl from the Southwest Border

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Let me start by saying that tackling the drug crisis is one of our most pressing national security, law enforcement, and public health challenges, and we must do more to protect American lives. Fentanyl presents the newest iteration of a drug problem that America has had for decades.

One way Congress can help protect Americans is to allocate resources to aggressively target the source of drug trafficking—Transnational Criminal Organizations or TCOs. We must understand that these organizations, including cartels south of our border, operate as a business. They are profit-driven. They are violent and criminal. But they are not political or ideological. Transnational criminal organizations profit from the demand for illicit drugs and at the expense of American lives.

The Biden Administration, through the agencies testifying today among others, are working tirelessly to combat the TCOs and drug traffickers. Rather than waste resources building a wall or using migrants as scapegoats, the Biden Administration has made historic investments in border security and in fighting the scourge of fentanyl. The Administration has directed resources to the places where the drugs are *actually* entering this country.

We know that about 90 percent of fentanyl is trafficked in cars and trucks through ports of entry, not between them. And even the fentanyl caught between ports of entry is mostly seized in vehicles at checkpoints or out at sea – not on the backs of migrants. In addition, it's important to recognize that U.S. citizens, not undocumented migrants, represent more than 85 percent of convictions for fentanyl trafficking.

The Biden Administration has invested in technology at the ports of entry to scan travelers, vehicles, and cargo entering the United States with the intent to distribute illicit drugs. With these investments, seizures are now at a record high. Unfortunately, CBP is only able to scan about two percent of passenger vehicles and just 15 percent of commercial vehicles. Imagine the amount of drugs we could stop from coming into the country if we invested as much in non-intrusive inspection technology as Republicans want to spend on more border wall.

This whole-of-government approach led to the Administration to establish Operations *Blue Lotus* and *Four Horsemen* this spring. Under these initiatives, CBP, HSI and State and local partners stopped nearly 10,000 pounds of fentanyl from entering our communities and conducted 284 arrests for fentanyl-related charges in just two months. These operations are just a couple measures in the Biden Administration's multi-pronged strategy to combat TCOs and curtail the flow of illicit fentanyl.

I want to commend Customs and Border Protection and other agencies for their coordinated efforts to increase the number of seizures and related investigations. I can't help but note that just a few years ago my Republican colleagues touted drug seizures as a measure of success under the Trump Administration.

Now that the Biden Administration has record seizures due to its investments and its commitment to detection and interdiction efforts, my Republican colleagues are criticizing the administration. This is the height of hypocrisy.

While I appreciate the Administration's efforts to stop fentanyl and other drugs from entering our communities, it's important to recognize that this is just one part of the solution. Law enforcement and border security alone will never be enough. We must also tackle this crisis with treatment and recovery options to restore people's health and break the devastating cycle of addiction.

I urge my Republican colleagues to work together to provide the necessary resources to Federal agencies to combat TCOs and prevent fentanyl trafficking.

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