



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

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Joint Hearing Statement of Border Security & Enforcement Subcommittee Ranking Member Lou Correa (D-CA)

Opening the Flood Gates: Trump's Broken Border Barrier

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I am glad that we all agree on the need to effectively secure our border. I don't, however, believe that a border wall is the best way to achieve that. The wall is a Clinton-era project from 30 years ago. But the challenges of today look very different than they did 30 years ago. I think the question we should all be asking ourselves is how the border wall fits into the challenges we are seeing today. Our world has changed since the Clinton era, particularly with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many in this room voted to end the COVID-19 public health emergency, thereby ending Title 42. They also predicted border chaos, which has yet to materialize. And now many seem disappointed that numbers have dropped. That our border is under control. Because the reality is that Title 8 imposes criminal consequences on migrants who cross between ports of entry. And this Administration has in place a policy to deter people from crossing between ports of entry.

To be clear I don't agree with that policy. But it's hard to argue with the fact that numbers have dropped since the end of Title 42. And it didn't take building a wall to make that happen. The world is experiencing an unprecedented migratory crisis like no other since World War II. As I have reiterated in the past, the challenge we face is a worldwide issue that requires worldwide solutions.

Let's be clear – the wall is not preventing migrants from coming to the United States, but rather directing migrants to cross in more remote and dangerous areas of the border. It's no surprise then that Border Patrol has seen more deaths and assisted in more rescues as a result. We've also seen more injuries, traumatizing families, and costing our hospitals millions of dollars.

As we will hear today, a local hospital in the San Diego Sector witnessed an unprecedented increase in traumatic brain injuries and spinal injuries from border wall falls in 2019. This is neither humane nor effective.

To address border security, we need to address the push factors driving people to migrate. No one wants to pick up and leave their homes and families. If thousands of families are willing to trek through the dangerous Darien Gap to get to the United States, like the little girl in this photo, do we really think that a wall is going to stop them?

It won't. That's why we need partnerships with Mexico and countries in Latin America and Central America.

This chart shows the magnitude of the refugee challenge we are facing just in this region. And that countries are stepping up. Colombia, for example, is accepting millions of Venezuelans. Others, like Guatemala, are allowing new migrant processing centers to be established in their countries. The wall never helped with cooperation in the region. Refugees are not just our problem or their problem.

Refugees are our collective challenge and opportunity. Today, we are seeing the full integration of the North American markets.

Some of my colleagues will argue that the wall is an important deterrent for smugglers and criminals unlawfully entering the country. But can we solve a 21st-century problem with a Bill Clinton solution? As we heard during last week's hearing, transnational criminal organizations are exploiting legitimate private-sector trade to move fentanyl precursors and pill presses between China, Mexico, and the U.S. And, we're now seeing precursors move through our seaports. A border wall doesn't address this trade.

Cartels are smuggling the overwhelming majority of drugs through our ports of entry, using creative methods of concealment. For example, just last month, CBP officers seized 900,000 fentanyl pills concealed in porcelain sinks at the Otay Mesa port of entry. I don't see how a border wall helps us tackle the drugs coming through our ports of entry. In addition, we heard last week how cartels are using drones that cost two hundred dollars to send million-dollar payloads of drugs high over any border barrier. The fact that my colleagues continue to focus on the border wall again and again makes our committee look out-of-touch with reality.

Instead of spending taxpayer dollars—or in the previous Administration's case—shifting money from countering drug missions—let's invest in our ports of entry, in our CBP personnel, and, importantly, in addressing the root causes to migration with our international partners.

In a time of exponential growth in cross-border trade, let's dedicate resources to inspection technology to interdict dangerous drugs like fentanyl. Let's keep the bad stuff out, and let the good things in. Between the ports of entry, we can deploy innovative technologies like sensors and autonomous towers to detect and identify threats. Some of these technologies are even being made in my district.

The Biden-Harris Administration has engaged in these solutions. I'm sad to say that my colleagues across the aisle voted against funding these initiatives to combat modern threats against proven solutions that are working. I hope that going forward, this committee can work together to combat not only the threats of today, but also those of tomorrow.

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