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

On the Line: Border Security from an Agent and Officer Perspective

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

January 9, 2018

Today's hearing is being held in the wake of President Trump's request for \$18 BILLION to build a "big, beautiful wall" along the southern border.

Spending billions on a boondoggle border wall to fulfill a campaign promise is a terrible use of American taxpayer money and bad border policy.

The President made his request despite the fact that the Government Accountability Office has concluded U.S. Customs and Border Protection has no metrics to show how a wall contributes to border security, or if it contributes at all.

Cartels have a way of going around, over, under, or through these walls, underscoring that walls are no panacea for our border security challenges.

Meanwhile, apprehensions have continued to decline over time, to the point where each Border Patrol agent is now apprehending an average of just 17 individuals annually.

As the CATO Institute has said, given this fact it is difficult to make the case that more Border Patrol agents should be a priority.

Moreover, it is hard to envision how the Administration would be able to hire the additional 5,000 Border Patrol agents the President has requested when they cannot even keep up with current attrition.

Both the Border Patrol and the Office of Field Operations continue to lose personnel, as more officers and agents leave each month than are hired to replace them.

DHS needs to do a better job of retaining the Border Patrol agents and CBP officers it already has by giving them the pay, benefits, and location mobility they deserve.

In particular, the Trump Administration has completely overlooked critical staffing shortages at our ports of entry, where CBP officers are often being forced to work 16 hour shifts and take temporary duty assignments to compensate for the lack of officers.

These conditions compromise homeland security, slow legitimate travel and trade that is essential to our economy, and burn out good, hardworking officers.

Why would we spend billions on a wall in the desert while leaving our ports of entry vulnerable to human smugglers and drug traffickers?

Simply put, it makes no sense.

But then, very little about the Trump Administration's border security policy does.

Still, this latest effort to use DREAMers as a bargaining chip to fulfill President Trump's fantasy of a closed immigration system and an unnecessary border wall is a new low for this Administration.

These demands are non-starters for Democrats and only show us that the President is not acting in good faith.

I hope to hear from our witnesses today about what we can do to help better secure America's borders, support the men and women on the front lines, and do so in a way that honors our values as a Nation of immigrants.

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