

## **Statement of Ranking Member Filemon Vela (D-TX)**

### **Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security Hearing**

#### ***Boots at the Border: Examining the National Guard Deployment to the Southwest Border***

**July 24, 2018**

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Today we will discuss the most recent National Guard deployment to our southern border. As I stated on the day this deployment was announced, this is a horrendous idea. As with many of this Administration's justifications for misguided border security actions, context and strategy are completely lacking.

The southern border is not a lawless war zone, and what chaos we have seen has been created by this Administration. My district is in the Border Patrol's Rio Grande Valley sector – one of the higher traffic sectors along the southern border. This sector has the second largest number of Border Patrol agents assigned to it, only behind Tucson.

We also have a large contingent of Texas Department of Public Safety personnel assisting the Border Patrol, and I know that our local law enforcement officials are engaged in keeping our communities secure along this stretch of the border. In addition, the Texas National Guard has an ongoing border security mission ever since former Governor Rick Perry deployed 1,000 Guardsmen to the Texas-Mexico border in 2014.

To say that the border is lawless is a lie.

Deploying National Guard personnel to the southern border is not new but the circumstances for this deployment are unusual. Facts and context matter despite the Administration's repeated attempts to frame them in a way that justifies its misguided and inhumane policies.

As you can see in this graph, there were 70 percent fewer apprehensions in March 2018 – a month before President Trump's order – than in the month before President Bush's 2006 mobilization. In 2006, U.S. Customs and Border Protection had 50 percent fewer Border Patrol agents onboard than we have today, and the average agent apprehended approximately 97 people per year.

For context, in 2017 the average Border Patrol agent apprehended less than 20 people per year across all northern and southern border sectors. To say that immigrants are overrunning our border is a lie.

The purposes for the prior two deployments were also different than the one launched earlier this year. During Operation Jump Start, the Bush Administration was in the midst of hiring and training thousands more Border Patrol agents, and once staffing levels increased by 40 percent, the operation ended in 2008. Operation Phalanx was launched in 2010 when cartel violence on the Mexican side was rising and the threat of spillover violence was a serious concern.

Today, apprehension levels are at the lowest levels we have seen since the early 1970s and the threat of border violence is less. The purposes for this new deployment are purely reactionary and political. Let's remember that in early April, the President was reacting impulsively to backlash from the far-right about the spending bill he had just signed that had less than the \$25 billion he wanted for his boondoggle border wall.

DHS had also just reported that apprehension levels were rising as they typically do in the early spring months. Keep in mind that more than one-third of apprehensions along the southwest border in the first five months of fiscal year 2018 were of unaccompanied children and families. We know that these individuals often seek out Border Patrol agents in order to request asylum or other humanitarian aid.

The White House and the rest of the Administration spun itself up into a frenzy over the so-called “caravan,” and the President announced his intention to militarize our border. DHS and DOD then had to scramble to pull together this deployment in the following weeks.

Around that same time, the Administration began to criminally charge apprehended adults, separate families without a thought to reunification, and obstruct people legally seeking asylum at our ports of entry.

The reasons for this new National Guard deployment and harsh immigration policies had to be overblown, and the chaos that the Administration was claiming as justification was fabricated. Clearly, mobilizing the National Guard to support CBP operations can be done with a clear purpose and strategy. This does not seem to be the case this time around.

I thank our witnesses for joining us today, but I fear that your time and resources are being misspent on a deployment that may be nothing more than political show.