

**Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Border Security and Immigration  
Senate Judiciary Committee**

**February 10, 2025**

**Testimony of Eric P. Schwartz  
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Thank you for inviting me to testify today.

My name is Eric Schwartz. I served as dean of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota between 2011 and 2017 and am now Professor and Chair of the Global Policy area at the Humphrey School. Earlier in my career, I served as a congressional Subcommittee staffer, as a member of the National Security Council staff, and as Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration, among other positions in public life.

The school where I teach is situated in the Cedar–Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis, a community with one of the highest concentrations of Somali Americans in the country. Since the arrival of Somali immigrants in the 1990s, the neighborhood has become a center of Somali American life, with Somali-owned businesses and institutions contributing substantially to its commercial vitality and social infrastructure in a community that faced economic distress in the 1970s and 1980s.

As members of this Committee are aware, Minneapolis is now hosting a militarized federal law-enforcement presence involving thousands of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) personnel. Commercial activity in Cedar–Riverside and in other immigrant neighborhoods has slowed dramatically. This is due in large measure to documented and abusive practices whose victims have included U.S. citizens and lawfully present immigrants of many nationalities. There are highly credible and documented reports of abuses by federal law enforcement personnel that have included unlawful killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, harsh mistreatment, transport out of the state, and, perhaps most ominously, disregard of court orders.

As an educator I see the human consequences of this first-hand: a student living in fear after encountering unidentified individuals seeking out an immigrant neighbor in the student's apartment building; another student enduring heartbreak and suffering as a loved one is detained through no fault of their own, tearing a young family apart; and a pervasive anxiety that now shapes our learning and civic environment.

I raise this context because it would be unconscionable at this hearing not to raise an obvious and deep concern: why has this Committee chosen to focus its attention on an important but non-violent category of criminal activity — activity that is already being investigated and prosecuted

by law-enforcement authorities — while remaining largely silent about a broad pattern of serious civil rights abuses affecting immigrant communities and U.S. citizens in Minneapolis?

Patterns of fear, intimidation, and disregard for legal safeguards are not theoretical concerns; they are hallmarks of repression we more readily associate with countries like Russia or China. And it should go without saying that these issues should be an overriding concern of Members of Congress.

Members of the Committee should also be alarmed about the framing of this hearing, entitled “*Somali Fraud: The Tip of the Iceberg.*”

That title risks tarring an entire community with a presumption of criminality based on the alleged actions of a small fraction of its members.

By way of illustration, it would have been just as inappropriate to hold a hearing entitled “*Italian Heroin Trafficking, Racketeering, Money Laundering, and Conspiracy: The Tip of the Iceberg?*” while examining organized-crime violence in New York during the era of the so-called *Pizza Connection* prosecutions.

Those cases, brought through the early 1990s, involved all the crimes I mentioned. They were linked to the Mafia and resulted in numerous convictions and lengthy prison sentences. Yet framing those prosecutions as an indictment of Italian Americans as a group would not only have wrongly maligned the entire Italian American community but promoted pernicious prejudices. They would have been rightly condemned by Americans who respected their neighbors of Italian heritage and who recognized all forms of prejudice as un-American.

In short, we would have characterized that framing of Italians as bigoted.

The problems around the framing of this hearing are dramatically compounded when the President of the United States refers to Somali Americans as garbage and declares that he doesn’t want them in the United States.

Such bigotry is not beside the point. It is the point.

And when it comes from the highest office in the country, it creates a context in which congressional framing choices carry even greater weight.

Turning to the Somali community in Minneapolis more broadly, there is no question that Somali Americans have played a significant and positive role in the vitality of Minnesota’s economy. Minnesota’s income level, income distribution, and overall quality of life measurements are well above the national average, in no small measure due to Minnesota’s immigrant population. In fact, economist Bruce Corrie has estimated that Somalis immigrants in Minnesota generate roughly \$8 billion annually in economic activity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MPR News, “Economist: immigrants contribute \$26 billion to Minnesota’s economy.” December 11, 2025. Accessed on February 9. [https://www.mprnews.org/episode/2025/12/11/economist-immigrants-contribute-26-billion-to-minnesotas-economy?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.mprnews.org/episode/2025/12/11/economist-immigrants-contribute-26-billion-to-minnesotas-economy?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

Immigrants overall are critical to Minnesota's labor force and demographic stability. The state faces persistent workforce shortages and its population is aging. I was involved in a University project that resulted in a landmark 2017 study by my colleague, University of Minnesota researcher Professor Ryan Allen, emphasizing that immigration is essential to sustaining Minnesota's labor supply and long-term economic growth.<sup>2</sup> That study concluded that without substantially increased levels of immigration, Minnesota would come nowhere near meeting future demands for labor. Trends since the time of that study only support its essential message.

In many ways, Cedar–Riverside itself underscores these realities. Prior to the large-scale arrival of Somali and other immigrant communities in the 1990s, the neighborhood experienced economic distress, disinvestment, and high vacancy rates. Immigrant settlement contributed to housing stabilization, small-business formation, and renewed commercial activity. These contributions are visible and measurable, not speculative. I and my colleagues at the University, not to mention community members, enjoy the benefits of these contributions regularly – in Thai, Chinese, Somali, Ethiopian, and other immigrant establishments that characterize our wonderful neighborhood around the Humphrey School on the West Bank of the University of Minnesota campus.

Let me now turn to the subject of refugee vetting, as I know this is one area of interest to the Subcommittee.

Refugees fleeing violence, persecution, and poverty are among the world's most desperate individuals, but they are also among the most determined. Flight is extraordinarily difficult, as many of us know from our own family histories. My grandfather, George (Gershon) Schwartz, fled antisemitism in Romania. I remember vividly the stories of the conditions that forced his departure. Yet the thought of him, as a Romanian-Jewish teenager, navigating our refugee vetting system is frankly daunting.

Of course, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was virtually no refugee vetting. Today, the situation is entirely different. By the advent of the second Trump administration, the United States had in place one of the most extensive refugee-vetting systems in the world. Refugees face vetting that is more thorough than for any other travelers to the United States. Applicants undergo multiple layers of screening, including biographic and biometric checks, as well as overseas in-person interviews by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services officers, interagency security reviews involving intelligence and law-enforcement databases, and medical screening. Somali refugee applicants, among other nationalities from areas of conflict, have been subject to additional scrutiny and enhanced verification measures developed over the past decade or so.

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<sup>2</sup> Allen, *Immigrants and Minnesota's Workforce*, Commissioned by the Committee on Minnesota Workforce and Immigrants and University of Minnesota Office of the Vice President for Research, January 2017. Accessed on February 9, 2026, At <https://conservancy.umn.edu/items/0c44a6d0-7dc4-4fc1-a569-d818fafcfc0b>

Does this system eliminate risk entirely? No system can. But it creates powerful deterrents and reflects a serious effort by the United States to balance security with its long-standing commitment to offering refuge to those in need.

Finally, I want to address the *Feeding Our Future* issue and related cases in Minnesota.

These allegations involve serious crimes and significant sums of money, and they are being treated as such. The investigations were initiated and the indictments were announced prominently by U.S. Attorney Andrew Luger, a highly respected prosecutor praised for his diligence and non-partisanship, who had been twice nominated by Sen. Amy Klobuchar and had twice served in this position. In announcing the indictments, he said that the defendants “prioritized their own greed...to purchase luxury cars, houses, jewelry, and coastal resort property abroad.”

Lugar secured dozens of indictments. And as of early this year, more than 50 individuals have pleaded guilty or been convicted at trial. Although the lead prosecutor in the case recently either resigned or was removed from his position, cases are proceeding through the courts, where they belong. And additional investigations of expanded illegal activity should be pursued by law enforcement. In fact, if the President was serious about addressing this kind of criminal activity, a purported cause of the militarized federal presence in Minneapolis, he would have ensured retention of the highly competent legal team he had in place, and would have sent to Minneapolis forensic experts rather than thousands of ICE and CBP agents that are abusing the rights of residents.

In conclusion, fraud must be investigated and prosecuted wherever it occurs. But Congress should not allow legitimate law enforcement to be accompanied by rhetoric that stigmatizes entire communities. Precision matters — in prosecutions, in oversight, and in language. Somali Minnesotans are not defined by indictments that represent a marginal percentage of the population; they are defined by their contributions as workers, students, entrepreneurs, and neighbors, and through their contribution to our country and community through military and other forms of public service.

Moreover, if one key concern of Members of the Senate on the Judiciary Committee is accountability for violations of civil rights, as it should be, then I urge you to direct your focus where accountability is most at risk — in safeguarding citizens and all immigrants from abuses by those entrusted to enforce the law.