

Living Up to America's Promise: The Need to Bolster the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

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Chairman Padilla, Ranking Member Cornyn, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee: It is an honor to appear before you to discuss the Refugee Admissions Program.

My testimony today examines the current refugee challenges through the lens of someone who has looked at this problem from a whole-of-government approach as the former Commanding General of Special Operations Command North and prior to that as the Assistant Commanding General for Special Operations Command Central. This experience includes 36 years of service to the nation experiencing refugee challenges firsthand around the world.

My testimony today is my own opinion based on those years of experience and does not represent the opinion or policy of anyone else.

My goal today is to hopefully bring you a unique set of perspectives and possible points to consider as you ponder the path forward on this very challenging issue.

The first portion of my testimony will focus on the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). USRAP has been around for some time and has shown to be an underutilized but effective program. It is thoughtfully designed and does the due diligence that is needed to ensure that the person claiming refugee status is indeed a valid entrant to the program—that is, that the applicants are truly persecuted on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, and that they do not pose a national security threat to the United States. The program allows the U.S. Government to manage through a deliberate process which in turn leads to the best-forecasted outcomes since it is a planned program. As noted, President Biden increased the number from 15,000 per year to 125,000 per year, although the Administration projected last year's admissions to be only 23,000 to 25,000. This committee has, on the whole, expressed support for helping victims of persecution through the Refugee Admission Program. I could not agree more that this is the right way to bring in refugees who have a strong desire to be U.S. citizens.

In contrast to the orderly, deliberate process of screening refugees through the USRAP, the current situation on the southern border poses a risk to our safety and national security. Many of the migrants who have crossed the border and claimed asylum do not meet those qualifications (the same standard that applies to refugees) and desire to enter the country for economic,

and medical reasons, are being trafficked as slaves, sex workers, organ harvesting, and drug mules/dealers, criminals, on a terrorist watch list, and cartel elements. There are other reasons, but the key point is that for most they are looking at what is the easiest way to enter the country. Some have noble reasons and some do not.

This has led to many refugees taking the “easy wrong” versus the “hard right” of the USRAP. Some are convinced by cartels that the cartels’ way is the best way because it is a cheaper process and they guarantee you will get in or they will cross you again. Some people are trafficked in and the cartels own them as they pay off the cost of entry. This factor, combined with the people who do not qualify for asylum, leads to a huge demand for the cartel model of entering the country.

The Biden Administration has announced its intent to triple refugee resettlement from the Western Hemisphere through the U.S. Refugee Admission Program. If we don’t take serious action to deter migrants from taking the wrong way, and placing their lot with the cartels, this approach will not have its intended result.

It is worth pointing out that these illicit pathways have existed for decades and the only thing that changes is the commodity that is passed through them. When I was SOCNORTH CDR we saw a lot of human trafficking because that was where the money

was. Drugs had declined because they had become less profitable than human trafficking. Fentanyl was just starting to rise and was a concern for us given the ease of production and movement that was on the horizon. I think a point that can be made is that the size of the breakage rate or seizure of drugs is in proportion to the amount coming across (i.e., a large seizure means more coming across on a net basis). The best approach is to look at the cartels as a business and they are going to move whatever commodity makes them the most money, and when that dries up they will look at other means to generate revenue just like a business. We are competing against a well-marketed program with global reach that is cheaper, faster and has a guarantee to deliver, and is highly adaptable.

So for our program to be the program that is selected we need to make it more attractive and also increase the difficulty of the illicit pathways. This will not be easy given the impressive track record the cartels have in getting people/commodities into the United States.

Some things to consider as you look to increase security on the southern border and protect people who are truly persecuted:

- 1. Vetting needs to happen outside the country to ensure the right people enter. Our system is not designed to quickly vet large numbers of migrants on the border for the veracity of*

their asylum claims and any potential criminal background and national security threat.

- 2. Understand it is a business for cartels, and whatever action you take they will counter to make money. That may be a different commodity or some action inside the U.S. that will generate revenue with those that are indebted to them. They are in business to make money.*
- 3. A lot of disinformation is fed to those who try to transit through our border.*
- 4. Innovation is taking away many lower entry-level jobs here in the United States. We need to bring in people who need our help but we can also provide the path to success for. (ie Amazon Market and McDonald's reduced their workforce due to technology replacing service roles.)*
- 5. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome. If the changes you make are working, you will see a decrease in illegal entries, and we will be able to offer refuge to the truly persecuted. If not, try something else and realize that you have a competitor for market share.*
- 6. From a global perspective, we need to make sure that failed states can get their national talent back and not keep them. If not, we will be creating an ungoverned space that various actors will exploit.*

I thank you for your time and look forward to any questions I might be able to answer.