

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

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MINORITY (202) 225-5074

<http://oversight.house.gov>

February 12, 2019

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Madam Secretary:

We appreciate your leadership of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the dedication of the over 240,000 DHS employees who protect our country every day from national security threats. With reports that a caravan of 12,000 people from Central America will reach our southern border soon, we write to request information about the threat posed by these caravans and the work of DHS to enhance border security.

Since last year, thousands of individuals have traveled in caravans from Central America to the United States.<sup>1</sup> In November 2018, DHS disclosed that over 270 individuals in a caravan traveling toward the United States had committed violent crimes—such as aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, armed robbery, and sexual assault against a child—or known ties to violent gangs.<sup>2</sup> Some members of the caravans have even used women and children as “human shields” in clashes with federal agents in Guatemala,<sup>3</sup> and assaulted U.S. law enforcement officials with rocks, glass bottles, and other projectiles.<sup>4</sup>

Equally alarming is the potential sex trafficking that could occur in these caravans. In the last two years, the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) initiated approximately 2,000 human trafficking cases—assisting about 1,000 victims, making over 3,000 criminal arrests, and 1,200 convictions.<sup>5</sup> In one prior egregious case, HSI

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of Commissioner Kevin McAleenan, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Joint Press Conference with Northcom, (Oct. 29, 2018), <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/speeches-and-statements/statement-commissioner-kevin-mcaleenan-us-customs-and-border>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. DEP’T OF HOMELAND SECURITY, MYTH VS. FACT: CARAVAN (2018), <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2018/11/01/myth-vs-fact-caravan>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> See, Statement of Commissioner Kevin McAleenan, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, on Incident at San Ysidro Yesterday Afternoon, (Nov. 26, 2018), <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/speeches-and-statements/statement-commissioner-mcaleenan-incident-san-ysidro-yesterday>; Stephen Dinan, ‘Violent Mob’ Repelled in Attempt to Storm U.S. Border in San Diego, WASH. TIMES (Jan. 1, 2019), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jan/1/border-patrol-agents-repel-migrant-caravan-violent/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Hidden in Plain Sight: Understanding Federal Efforts to Stop Human Trafficking, Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Border and Maritime Security of the H. Comm. on Homeland Security*, 115<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2018) (statement of Steve

arrested 29 people in eight states for sex trafficking women and girls from Mexico and Central America illegally transported across the southern border.<sup>6</sup>

Now it appears there are three new caravans moving through Central America toward the United States. On February 5, you reported that a nearly 2,000-alien caravan had recently arrived in Northern Mexico to cross our southern border.<sup>7</sup> Another caravan with almost 12,000 members is reportedly also in transit to the United States.<sup>8</sup> As these large caravans near our southern border, the Department and its components must be fully prepared to protect our border from possible criminals attempting to enter unlawfully.

As the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress begins, we look forward to working with you to ensure DHS and its components are fully equipped to secure the southern border. To assist the Committee's oversight of border security, we ask that you please provide the following documents and information:

1. An estimate of the total number of individuals in the current and prior caravans, including available data about those who have a criminal history and known criminal convictions;
2. An account explaining the resources employed by the Department to respond to migrant caravans traveling to the southern border, including the Department's efforts to provide humanitarian assistance;
3. An explanation of how the governments of Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador handle increased migration movements in their respective countries, including Mexico's efforts to offer asylum to caravan participants;
4. Any information available to DHS about the individuals or entities financing or sponsoring the caravans;
5. An explanation of DHS's coordination with the Department of Defense and the Department of State, including the DHS's Human Smuggling Cell, the State Department's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigators relating to caravans traveling to our southern border; and

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W. Cagen, Special Agent In Charge, Homeland Security Investigations Denver), <https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Testimony/2018/180925cagen.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> News Release, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE Arrests 29 People in 8 States on Human Trafficking Charges, Identifies 15 Potential Victims, Following Multistate Undercover Investigation (Oct. 30, 2015), <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-arrests-29-people-8-states-human-trafficking-charges-identifies-15-potential>.

<sup>7</sup> Statement of Secretary Kristjen Nielsen, U.S. Dep't of Homeland Security, on New Migrant 'Caravan', (Feb. 5, 2019), <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2019/02/05/secretary-nielsen-statement-new-migrant-caravan>.

<sup>8</sup> See, Stephen Dinan, *U.S. Tracking Three Migrant Caravans, One With 12,000 People*, WASH. TIMES (Jan. 29, 2019), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/jan/29/us-tracking-three-migrant-caravans-one-12000-people/>; Juan Montes, *New Caravan Grows as Mexico Eases Passage*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (Jan. 22, 2019), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-caravan-grows-as-mexico-eases-passage-11548191845>.

6. An explanation of DHS's efforts to address the increased number of asylum claims.

Please provide this information as soon as possible but no later than 5:00 p.m. on February 26, 2019. We ask that you arrange for DHS staff to brief us on these issues as soon as possible.

If you have any questions about this request, please ask your staff to contact Michael Koren or Kyle Smithwick of Committee staff at (202) 225-5074. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.



Jim Jordan  
Ranking Member

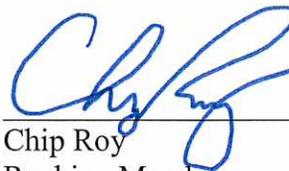
Sincerely,



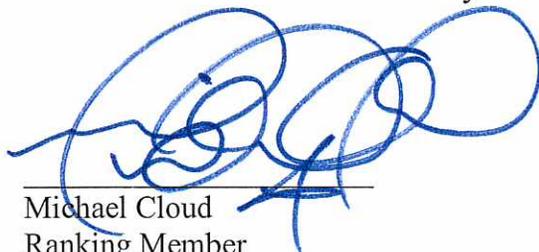
Mark Meadows  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Government Operations



Jody Hice  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on National Security



Chip Roy  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties



Michael Cloud  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy



James Comer  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Environment

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen

February 12, 2019

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cc: The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings  
Chairman

The Honorable Stephen F. Lynch  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on National Security

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Government Operations

The Honorable Jamie Raskin  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

The Honorable Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy

The Honorable Harley Rouda  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Environment