**Chairman Adam Smith**

**Full Committee Hearing on “Department of Defense’s Support to the Southern Border”**

**Opening Statement (Prepared)**

**January 29, 2019**

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Good morning. I’d like to welcome our witnesses here today, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, John Rood, and the Director of Operations (J3) for the Joint Staff, Vice Admiral Michael Gilday, and thank them for their time as we consider this important issue.

We are here today to understand the mission for the Department of Defense’s support at the southern border. Congress has a duty to ensure that we and the public understand how the Administration came to the decision to initiate and continue the deployment of Active Duty personnel, what the mission is for those personnel, how the deployment impacts their training and readiness needs, how long the Active Duty deployments will last, what impact our previous National Guard deployments have had, and what the cost is to American taxpayers.

President Trump announced the initial deployment of Active Duty troops to the southern border last October, and since then, the Department of Defense, at the direction of the President, has rotated several thousand service members, reaching a peak of approximately 5,900 Active Duty personnel. Yet, in previous years, when the military has supported the Department of Homeland Security along the southern border, National Guard personnel were deployed. In fact, National Guard troops were sent to the southern border in April 2018. To date, the impact of their deployment isn’t fully understood nor has there been a full justification for why the Administration subsequently diverted Active Duty personnel to the border or details regarding when that deployment will end.

Moreover, the deployments to the border seem to conflict with the Department’s stated efforts to rebuild readiness. For example, we have heard the Army raise concerns about the negative impact to readiness due to the high operational tempo of units deploying overseas and insufficient time to perform home station maintenance or training. This deployment to the southern border seems to exacerbate that problem by further disrupting unit training cycles.

It is also unclear why this is an appropriate use of the military’s time and resources. We have all seen the pictures of our service members on the southern border during the holiday season, away from their families, unable to reset from overseas missions, or to train and prepare for future missions in response to legitimate national security threats. It appears service members are laying concertina wire and performing other tasks that are better suited for civilian law enforcement agencies.

Further, the President’s characterizations of the Active Duty deployments, including tweets describing the military response to a caravan as repelling an “invasion,” and the makeup of caravans, which have not been factually accurate, are deeply troubling. While there may be more groups, many of the people coming to our borders are fleeing poverty, persecution, and violence in their home countries and turn themselves over to authorities with hopes of receiving asylum. For years, the Congress and previous administrations have repeatedly authorized additional funding in support of border security, including additional border agents, technology, and barriers in areas ***where they make sense***. As a result, unauthorized entries at the southern border are at historic lows. So, what is the emergency?

Despite this, if the President does declare a National Emergency, there are reports that the Department of Defense may be planning to divert billions of dollars in military construction funds to construct additional portions of a border wall. Such an action could adversely affect military training, readiness, or service and family member quality of life programs if military construction funding is diverted away from critical military projects.

In this hearing, we need to set the factual record straight about the Department’s support on the southern border. The American people deserve a full and honest discussion of these issues, and I look forward to having one today.

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