

Opening Statement – As Prepared  
**Ranking Member Rob Portman**  
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
*Nominations of:*  
*Robert Santos to be Director, U.S. Census Bureau*  
*Ed Gonzalez to be Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)*  
July 15, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Peters.

Welcome, Mr. Santos and Sheriff Gonzalez. Thank you for your willingness to serve in the federal government.

The Census Bureau provides a fundamental service to the nation. Census data supports activities throughout the country. Businesses and nonprofits use Census data for planning. State and local governments use Census data to make spending decisions. The federal government distributes more than a trillion dollars every year based on Census data. Most importantly, Census data supports the redistricting process, which is an essential part of our democracy's structure.

We often pay attention to a fundamental service like the Census Bureau when it stops working as well as it should. The delay in providing redistricting data has affected my state of Ohio and many other states. The Census Bureau has now agreed to provide redistricting data to Ohio by August 16.

I hope the Census Bureau meets that timeline. Mr. Santos, I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this as well as your views on the other challenges facing the Census Bureau.

Sheriff Gonzalez, the Director of ICE is a very important position for a critical agency and deserves this Committee's careful consideration.

We are in the middle of the worst immigration crisis in more than twenty years. In May, more than 180,000 migrants were encountered at our southern border.

The number of migrants apprehended at our border has risen every month since President Biden took office. More than 90 percent of them are crossing unlawfully and dangerously between our ports of entry.

Border Patrol agents also estimate, but generally do not report monthly, the number of migrants who evaded apprehension, also known as the “got aways.” This is a conservative estimate that likely undercounts the true numbers.

We are now seeing record numbers of “got aways” at the southern border. In March and April of this year, the Border Patrol estimates 70,000 migrants evaded apprehension by its agents.

I traveled to the southern border earlier this year. In El Paso, I watched families who were enrolled in the Migrant Protection Protocol, or MPP, be released into the United States.

Secretary Mayorkas and an ICE officer personally described the parole process to me as I witnessed it in real time.

The migrants came in and were handed a piece of paper that had phone numbers and emails of ICE Field Offices on the back.

They were told to “check in” with ICE whenever they reached their destination.

The ICE officer with Secretary Mayorkas explained that they hand out this paper “because we don’t know where they are going.”

This sheet of paper is also given to migrants crossing in the middle of the night by wading through the Rio Grande to be processed or in some cases rescued by Border Patrol agents.

Months later ICE is unable to tell Congress exactly how many migrants have “checked in” with ICE to receive a court date to hear their asylum claim. We have asked for this information repeatedly and have been told it is not available.

As we all know, cooperation between federal, state, and local law enforcement is critically important to keep our nation safe.

However, in 2017, Sheriff Gonzalez made the decision to end his department’s voluntary cooperation program with ICE. This voluntary cooperation, known as the 287G program, helps remove dangerous criminals from our communities.

Sheriff Gonzalez has stated that he still allows ICE to work inside his County's jail but spoke out forcefully against the Texas law that mandated this cooperation.

Sheriff Gonzalez, you are nominated to lead our primary interior enforcement agency for immigration law.

Even if the border crisis ended tomorrow, ICE will be dealing with the ramifications of this border crisis for years to come.

As I have said many times, we are a nation of immigrants but we are also a nation of laws. Our immigration laws are clear and they must be enforced.

Our committee needs to hear how you will do so as we consider your nomination.

Thank you.