

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-470](#), a report to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States and Canada share the longest common non-militarized border between two countries, spanning nearly 4,000 miles of land and maritime borders from the states of Washington to Maine. CBP, within DHS, has primary responsibility for securing U.S. borders at and between ports of entry.

GAO was asked to review CBP's efforts to secure the northern border between ports of entry. This report examines, among other things, (1) the staffing and resource challenges that CBP identified and actions it has taken to address those challenges and (2) the extent to which CBP has developed and implemented performance measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. GAO reviewed agency documentation and met with DHS and CBP officials in headquarters and field locations. This is a public version of a sensitive report that GAO issued in March 2019. Information that DHS deemed sensitive has been omitted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations, that Border Patrol and AMO each develop and implement performance measures to assess their effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. DHS concurred with both recommendations.

View [GAO-19-470](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gablerr@gao.gov.

June 2019

NORTHERN BORDER SECURITY

CBP Identified Resource Challenges but Needs Performance Measures to Assess Security Between Ports of Entry

What GAO Found

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) identified staffing and resource challenges affecting its enforcement activities along the U.S.-Canada (northern) border and actions to address them, but faces competing priorities. The U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol) and Air and Marine Operations (AMO) are the components within CBP responsible for securing U.S. borders between ports of entry in the land, air, and maritime environments. Border Patrol identified an insufficient number of agents that limited patrol missions along the northern border. AMO identified an insufficient number of agents along the northern border, which limited the number and frequency of air and maritime missions. Border Patrol and AMO also identified a variety of resource challenges along the northern border, such as limited radar and surveillance technology coverage and inadequate facilities to process and temporarily hold apprehended individuals. While the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and CBP identified actions to address staffing and resource challenges, it is unknown whether these challenges will be addressed. This is primarily because CBP's priority is to secure the U.S.-Mexico (southwest) border. Issued in January 2017, Executive Order 13767 directed DHS to take actions to secure the southwest border by, among other things, constructing physical barriers and hiring thousands of agents.

Examples of U.S. Border Patrol's Northern Border Areas of Responsibility



U.S. Border Patrol Detroit Sector



U.S. Border Patrol Havre Sector

Source: (Left) GAO; (Right) U.S. Customs and Border Protection. | [GAO-19-470](#)

While CBP has performance measures that assess selected border security operations or programs, some of which include data from the northern border, it does not have specific measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. For example, Border Patrol has performance measures that assess security in remote areas on the northern border, but the measures do not include data from maritime border areas. Developing and implementing such measures could help Border Patrol and AMO better assess the effectiveness of their northern border operations between ports of entry, including addressing challenges due to limited staffing and resources.