



**The Adjutant General's Department**

**Testimony of Major General John Harris, Adjutant General for Ohio**

**Ohio House of Representatives State and Local Government Committee**

**October 27, 2021**

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the Ohio House of Representatives' State and Local Government Committee - I am Major General John Harris Jr., and I have the privilege of leading and representing the more than 16,000 Soldiers, Airmen, State Defense Force members and civilians who are your Ohio National Guard. As I anticipate questions, I have made my opening remarks brief, but as detailed as permissible given the sensitivity of this effort and my commitment to maintain operational security for this ongoing mission along our Southwest border.

I focus my testimony today on describing aspects of the Ohio Army National Guard's selection, preparation, mobilization, and participation in the federal government's ongoing efforts to secure our Southwest border.

Additionally, I am able to broadly describe our Soldiers' responsibilities in supporting the United States Customs and Border Protection Agency and the Department of Homeland Security serving along our nation's Southern border. As the Ohio Army National Guard is one of many active and reserve component organizations supporting the Southwest border mission, my comments and perspective are limited to what I was able to observe on the ground as it relates to our Soldier's training and operational tasks. It is based entirely upon what I know as a leader who is fully committed to fulfilling my organization's obligation to uphold the Constitution of the United States and execute national defense strategy.

### **UNIT SELECTION**

Fundamentally, the process for selecting a National Guard unit to mobilize in support of the Southwest border is no different from other active duty deployments we have experienced since 9/11. As a comprehensive and well-established system, sourcing and selection for homeland or overseas contingencies and named operations are based on the strategic needs of a Combatant Commander, in this case the US Northern Command (US NORTHCOM), and units and/or capabilities residing in the active and reserve components that are able and available to perform the requested missions, roles, and tasks. For the current mission supporting the Southwest border – there are over 3,000 active duty and reserve service members working to augment the United States

Customs and Border Protection Agency in a number of non-law enforcement duties and roles.

Though the notifications for the Southwest border occurred on shorter timelines than many previous deployments, the proven process of sourcing, selecting, and notifying states and individual units did adhere to a clearly defined path beginning with the President of the United States, through to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and on to the National Guard Bureau. Once received at the National Guard Bureau, a detailed assessment of available Army and Air National Guard capabilities and resources occurred and culminated with the selection of units from over 20 states for missions in 2021. This system, often referred to as a federal mobilization, ensures transparency in the selection process, while maintaining a balance among the different components and states. Additionally, the selection process for the National Guard intentionally seeks to maintain adequate forces in each state so that Governors continue to have response forces at their disposal.

I would also add that our mobilizations in support of the Southwest border are federal requests and our response is not in conjunction with, nor in support of ongoing individual state missions occurring in Texas by the Texas National Guard or in Arizona by the Arizona National Guard. These individual state missions are authorized and funded solely by their Governor in the same way that the state of Ohio uses state active duty to respond to emergencies in Ohio. I realize there is some confusion in

distinguishing the internal efforts of these two states and those of the federal government, but our role on the Southwest border has been completely under the auspice of federal requests and under the control of US NORTHCOM.

### **UNIT PREPARATION**

In this particular mobilization scenario, US NORTHCOM is continuing to respond to approved requests from the United States Customs and Border Protection Agency and DHS to assist in managing the surge in immigration along the Southern borders of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. The National Guard has provided responsive, mission-enhancing support of non-law enforcement duties in order for Customs and Border Protection to address security challenges and focus on their law enforcement mission.

Our training prior to deployment to the Southwest border has paralleled the traditional pre-mobilization requirements we complete for overseas operations in terms of generating staff proficiency, ensuring each member of the unit can accomplish their specific Soldier responsibilities, and maintaining a high level of individual medical and physical readiness. At no time has the pre-deployment training model been altered or modified to prepare our personnel to assume the legal jurisdiction of a border patrol agent or assume their authority to arrest, detain, and search anyone whether a US citizen or immigrant. The majority of training that does

occur with the border patrol is either On-The-Job (OJT) for a specific role or carrying out responsibilities that are common to both the military and the United States Customs and Border Protection Agency. Examples would include providing surveillance and monitoring of locations, reporting information, analyzing data/information, managing radio/digital communications, and maintaining equipment or facilities.

## **UNIT MOBILIZATION AND PARTICIPATION**

Our initial unit selected for mobilization and deployment to the Southwest border in October of 2020 was 121 members of the 1484<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company from North Canton, Ohio. I visited this unit with Governor DeWine earlier this month and was able to see first-hand what they have been able to accomplish and provide to the border patrol in terms of operational, administrative, and collateral support outside of any direct law enforcement tasks or responsibilities. We have subsequently mobilized, prepared, and deployed 50 members of the 216<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion from Woodlawn, Ohio and 131 members of the 1194<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company from Chillicothe, Ohio in the last thirty days. Similar to overseas deployments, the span of each Southwest border mission is 12 months in duration. Additionally, Soldiers deployed to Southwest border are entitled to all benefits and entitlements incurred through federal mobilization to include the Post 9/11 GI Bill, accruing points toward their retirement, and access to TRICARE for their families while on federal orders.

Before I close, I want to again emphasize the role of the deployed Ohio Soldiers in a federal Title 10 status is to provide detection and monitoring support to enable CBP to conduct their law enforcement mission more efficiently and to support DHS efforts to manage border security and maintain established immigration processes. I'm pleased to tell you our Soldiers have been providing incredible service and professionally carrying out their mission. They continually make Ohio proud while demonstrating the incredible capacity, innovation and flexibility of the citizen Soldier. As the commander of the Ohio National Guard, I see no distinction in this mission from any other we have been called to perform, nor do I believe that this operation detracts from our readiness or core principles of responding to the state and the nation.

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and esteemed committee members, thank you for your continued support of your Ohio National Guard. I hope that I have explained our role at the Southwest border while reinforcing the fact we, the Ohio National Guard, are always ready and always there to support our great state and nation.

Respectfully submitted,

Major General John Harris

The Adjutant General