

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 30, 2019

The Honorable Patrick M. Shanahan
Acting Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Shanahan:

I am deeply troubled with the testimony that this committee received yesterday regarding Department of Defense support to the southern border. Significant information, such as increases in active duty personnel, was not shared by Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, John Rood, when testifying about Department of Defense support to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) at the southern border. At best this was an error in judgement, at worst this was knowingly withholding information from this committee as it performs its oversight responsibility.

Secretary Rood was provided ample opportunity to comment on the current mission of active duty military personnel supporting the DHS and Custom and Border Patrol (CBP) at the southern border, as well as any additional requests from DHS that would result in an increase in active duty military personnel. While Secretary Rood testified about subsequent surveillance and barrier emplacement missions, he did not reference an increase of active duty military personnel nor offer personnel numbers or estimates to support that mission.

Yet, during your press briefing in the Pentagon Briefing Room, you shared a critical detail that the support mission to DHS at the southern border would require “several thousand” more personnel. It is disappointing and disconcerting that Secretary Rood, when asked comparable questions, could not, or would not, share similar information with the committee.

As you know, I have expressed deep concerns about the use of active duty military personnel at our southern border. To accurately understand the requirement and mission of our active duty forces, this committee has continually asked the Department for information since the active duty deployment was announced by the President in October 2018 to which the Department has been consistently slow to respond or, to date, unresponsive. Transparency from the Department is essential in the execution of the Congress’ duty to exercise oversight. Yesterday, the Department was not transparent about the number of active duty personnel needed for future support missions at the southern border. When given the opportunity to testify publicly about the mission at our southern border, the Department balked.

In my opening statement before yesterday's hearing, I said one of the goals of the hearing was to "set the factual record straight about the Department's support on the southern border." We did not achieve that goal with the testimony provided by Secretary Rood. I am committed to a productive dialogue between the committee and the Department, but to continue that, the Department needs to be forthcoming and offer complete and accurate information, and Secretary Rood did not provide that in yesterday's hearing.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Adam Smith
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee