

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 7, 2020

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Mark A. Morgan
Acting Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Washington, D.C. 20004

Kenneth L. Williams
Port Director, Blaine Sector
Blaine, WA 98230

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf, Acting Commissioner Morgan, and Port Director Williams:

We write to express our alarm about U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reportedly holding large numbers of people of Iranian heritage in secondary inspection for up to 12 hours over the weekend of January 4-5, 2020, at the Peace Arch Border Crossing in Blaine, Washington.

The *New York Times* reported that more than 60 people were held in secondary inspection for up to 10 hours.¹ Observers on the ground have reported that as many as 200 people were held for secondary inspection during this period.² Many impacted individuals were U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents, including seniors and children. In one case, CBP held a family of four U.S. citizens of Iranian descent—who were pre-screened for expedited processing as Nexus pass holders—for nearly five hours.³

In response to criticism, CBP stated that “CBP field leadership participated in a teleconference with Acting Commissioner Morgan and Deputy Commissioner Perez, where the field was asked to remain vigilant and increase their situational awareness given the evolving threat environment.”⁴ CBP also released statements attributing long waits to high traffic during late hours, when the port has lower staffing levels.⁵ These statements, however, do not explain why impacted persons were overwhelmingly of Iranian heritage, nor why pre-cleared U.S. citizen travelers would have been placed in secondary inspection and delayed for five hours. The

¹ Zolan Kanno-Youngs, Mike Baker & Mariel Padilla, *U.S. Stops Dozens of Iranian-Americans Returning from Canada*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 5, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/05/us/politics/iranian-americans-border.html>.

² Mike Baker & Caitlin Dickerson, *Iranian-Americans Questioned at the Border: ‘My Kids Shouldn’t Experience Such Things’*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 6, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/06/us/border-iranians-washington-patrol.html>.

³ Priscillia Alvarez, *Iranian-American Describes 5 Hour Delay For Questioning at US Border Crossing*, CNN (Jan. 6, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/06/politics/iranian-american-border-questioning/index.html>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

statements also do not explain why individuals appear to have been detained throughout the day on January 4, beginning as early as 8:00 am.

In response to these troubling reports, we request a briefing on the matters discussed above by no later than January 21, 2020. We also request the following documents, including transcripts or written descriptions of any verbal communications, by January 21, 2020:

1. Any directives, orders, guidance, instructions, musters, whether verbal or in writing, or other documents and communications—issued on or after January 2, 2020—from any Department of Homeland Security or CBP official to CBP Agents or Officers regarding the screening of individuals of Iranian heritage or any other changes in screening procedures in response to the death of Qasem Soleimani.
2. Any directives, orders, guidance, instructions, musters, whether verbal or in writing, or other documents and communications specific to the Blaine Sector regarding the screening of individuals of Iranian heritage or any other changes in screening procedures in response to the death of Qasem Soleimani.
3. Any directives, orders, guidance, instructions, musters, whether verbal or in writing, or other documents and communications to Port Directors regarding the screening of individuals of Iranian heritage or any other changes in screening procedures in response to the death of Qasem Soleimani.
4. Any directives, guidance, instructions, musters, whether verbal or in writing, or other documents and communications from any Port Director to CBP Agents or Officers regarding the screening of individuals of Iranian heritage or any other changes in screening procedures in response to the death of Qasem Soleimani.
5. For the Blaine Port of Entry (POE) from January 3-6, 2020, data on the number of people subject to secondary inspection, including a breakdown by age, ethnicity, country of birth, immigration status, and length of time in secondary inspection.
6. For the Blaine POE, from January 3-6, 2020, the total number of on-duty CBP agents assigned to the processing of travelers, for each hour of the day.

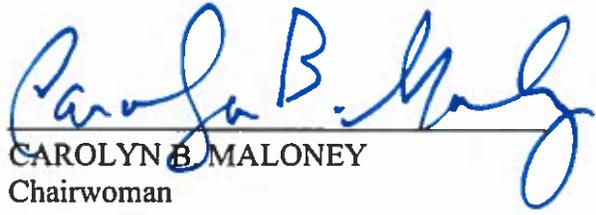
Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

		
PRAMILA JAYAPAL	JERROLD NADLER	ZOE LOFGREN
Vice Chair, Immigration Subcommittee	Chairman House Judiciary Committee	Chair, Immigration Subcommittee
House Judiciary Committee		House Judiciary Committee



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chair
Committee on Homeland Security



CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform



KATHLEEN RICE
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Border
Security, Facilitation, & Operations
Committee on Homeland Security