

Robert Perez

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER,
U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION



“WE ARE BEYOND the breaking point,” Customs and Border Protection Deputy Commissioner Robert Perez told CNN’s Brianna Keilar in March. “We have reached an unprecedented level with respect to this crisis situation, the amount of undocumented migrants that are driving along our southern border. ... Our facilities, our legal framework, our rescuing ... was never designed and built for this.”

Perez delivers this message with a level of composure and calm that stands in stark contrast to the rhetoric of the administration he now works for. That speaks to his 27 years working for the department, long before immigration animated such a visceral and polarizing national discourse. He began his career in 1992 as a customs inspector in Newark, New Jersey. After working his way through managerial positions at CBP headquarters, Perez served as the first director of the Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism in Washington. He then became the director of field operations for CBP’s New York field office, and by 2005, he was the director of field operations and port director in Detroit, Michigan, the busiest commercial-truck border-crossing in North America.

Immigration isn’t the only concern facing Perez, who also was named recently as executive assistant commissioner for operations support, serving as the agency’s senior career official and working alongside Acting Commissioner Mark Morgan. He’s also been intensely focused on fentanyl illegally entering the country through sales on the dark web, largely from China.

Perez and his team are using all the tools available to them, including a team of 1,200 canines able to detect the drug across nine international-mail facilities and 25 express facilities. CBP has also deployed thousands of doses of naloxone, which treats narcotic overdoses in emergency situations, and provided in-depth handling training to its officers.

“About five years ago, we in Customs and Border Protection seized a total of about 2 pounds of fentanyl nationwide,” a tiny fraction of total drugs seized annually, Perez said last year at *The Atlantic* Ideas Festival. “Three years later, that two pounds became 440. And just last year, we seized well over a thousand pounds.”

—Mary Frances McGowan

HOW THE NJ50 COMPARE ACROSS THREE CORE FACTORS

ROBERT PEREZ

REACH



IMPACT



INNOVATION



Reach: Sphere of influence in D.C.

Impact: Ability to create policy change or shift debates

Innovation: Disruptive or creative contributions

FAST FACTS

ROBERT PEREZ, BORDER PATROL
OFFICIAL

Industry

HOMELAND SECURITY

Key previous position

DIRECTOR OF FIELD OPERATIONS,
NEW YORK CBP FIELD OFFICE

Education

RUTGERS; HARVARD

Notable fact

RECEIVED KEYS TO THE CITY
FROM CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA