



## Trump's Border Protection Will Spend \$300 Million to Hire 5,000 Guards

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Customs and Border Protection is taking desperate measures at an exorbitant cost to hire agents to its dwindling workforce, after facing intense pressure from President Donald Trump to hire 5,000 new Border Patrol agents.

As of this year, the agency no longer asks applicants about prior illicit drug activity—an unprecedented departure from standard law enforcement hiring procedures—and will pay nearly \$300 million to a private company to help with the hiring process.

The border agency awarded a \$297-million contract to Accenture, an international professional services corporation, as Border Patrol struggles to meet mandated minimum levels of staffing because of a notoriously low retention rate.

The contract is for up to five years, with the company to be paid \$42.6 million the first year for assisting in the hiring of 5,000 Border Patrol agents, 2,000 customs officers and 500 agents for the Office of Air and Marine Operations.

Critics of Trump's hiring mandate question the enormous contract.

"They're spending almost \$40,000 per hire," Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, told *The Los Angeles Times*. "Just off the bat that seems like a pretty desperate move."

The base salary of an entry level Border Patrol agent is \$40,511, according to Customs and Border Protection's [website](#).

"Not unlike other major companies and organizations, we are expanding our recruiting and hiring efforts to find better, more effective ways to recruit, hire and retain frontline personnel," Katrina Skinner, an agency spokesperson, told *Newsweek* in an email. "As such, CBP awarded a contract to Accenture Federal Services to augment our internal hiring capabilities."

Customs and Border Protection also has relaxed hiring criteria, omitting what's widely considered a standard question many law enforcement agencies across the country ask applicants during the vetting process. Under Trump, applicants are no longer asked about past illegal drug

activity in an effort to widen the applicant pool, James Tomscheck, chief of internal affairs for the border agency from 2006 to 2014, said.

“Accuracy of the polygraph is compromised when you try to make it a less specific psychological test and that’s exactly what’s occurring,” Tomscheck told the Congressional Hispanic Caucus earlier this month.

“It’s not a test appropriate to test frontline law enforcement officers,” Tomscheck added.

Tomscheck, who has publicly accused the border agency of corruption, said potential agents were failing the traditional polygraph, first administered in 2008, in droves because of the question about criminal drug activity.

“We found 55 percent to 65 percent of CBP law enforcement applicants failed to clear the polygraph. The reasons those applicants failed were of greater concern,” Tomscheck said. “Many were found to have previously engaged in serious felony crimes, many were involved with border-related criminal activity and some were actually confirmed to be infiltrators who were directed by criminal organizations to seek employment at CBP.”

Customs and Border Protection did not respond to *Newsweek* questions about the change in polygraph procedure.

Approximately two out of three applicants to the border agency failed the traditional polygraph, [the Associated Press reports](#). That’s more than double the average rate of eight law enforcement agencies, according to AP.

The effort by Customs and Border Protection to quickly hire agents at any cost stem from an executive order Trump signed in January mandating the hires. Congress requires a force of 21,370 agents, but a May report stated there were only 19,500 agents. Adding to the problem is retention: Between 2013 and 2016, an average of 523 agents were hired, while 904 left, the [Los Angeles Times reported](#).

In another effort to widen the applicant pool, there’s a bill pending in Congress to eliminate the lie detector tests for certain applicants, such as members of the armed services.