

OPENING REMARKS BY SENATOR McCAIN
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
Hearing on Border Security: Moving Beyond the Virtual Fence
April 20, 2010

I want to thank Chairman Lieberman and Ranking Member Collins for holding this important hearing today. It was exactly one year ago today that Chairman Lieberman joined me in Phoenix for a field hearing to study the effects of the Mexican drug cartel violence on our border security. I am saddened that one year later the situation in Mexico has not improved and we are seeing serious spillover violence affecting Americans living near the border.

Just last month, three Americans were killed on the Mexican side of the border as they made their way home to the United States. Also last month, a third generation Arizona rancher was found dead on his property near the Mexican border reportedly shot by suspect that may have illegally entered our country. Last week it was reported that the death toll from the Mexican government's war on drug cartels is far higher than previously reported – more than 22,000 deaths in the past three years according to an April 14, 2010 article in *The Los Angeles Times* citing a confidential Mexican government report.

The violence along our southern border is increasing and impeding everyday life and the peace of mind of our citizens in the border region. Some believe that they are living in a lawless land where there is little or no consequence for the violation of their land, property and well-being. The federal government must do all it can within its power to curb this violence and protect its citizens from criminals coming across the border from Mexico. Americans living anywhere, but especially along the border, must feel safe and secure in their homes and on their property.

Unfortunately, during these violent and stressful times, the President's most recent budget submission seeks to cut 181 Border Patrol agents. This comes after the number of border patrol agents already declined from FY 2009 to FY 2010. I was pleased that Secretary Napolitano testified before this Committee that she will not let the number of Border Patrol agents along the southwest border decline, but I continue to be baffled by the Administration's proposal.

As all the witnesses here today well know, the Border Patrol Tucson Sector accounts for almost 50 percent of all illegal immigrant apprehensions across the country. Specifically, in FY 2009, the Border Patrol apprehended 241,453 individuals in Tucson Sector, which is the size of the population of Reno, Nevada.

The Tucson sector also accounts for almost 50 percent of all the marijuana seizures in the nation. In FY 2009, the Border Patrol seized more than 1.3 million pounds of marijuana in the Tucson Sector – the first time any Border Patrol Sector had ever before seized one million pounds of marijuana in a fiscal year. Additionally, 90 percent of the cocaine used in the United State comes through Mexico and much of it is smuggled though Arizona right up the I-10 highway. It is for these reasons, that in FY 2009, 73 percent of all the District of Arizona's criminal filings involved either immigration or drug charges.

Our Federal, state and local courts and law enforcement are overwhelmed attempting to investigate and prosecute these crimes. Citizens living near and along the border are frightened in their own homes. For these reasons, we must move immediately to fully secure our border.

Yesterday, Senator Kyl and I released a ten point border security action plan that calls for 3,000 National Guard troops to be sent to patrol the Arizona-Mexico border, 3,000 additional Border Patrol Agents to the Arizona-Mexico border, 24 hour-a-day surveillance by Predator B Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, construction of a fence that truly deters illegal entries among other issues. Many of these items are legislative issues Senator Kyl and I have pursued for many years and we will be introducing legislation in the near future related to these ten points.

I hope that the hearing today will highlight the outstanding work that our state and local officials are performing to provide for the safety of Americans despite the inability of the Federal government to secure the Southwest border from the flow of drugs, money laundering and illegal immigration. Additional federal action is urgently needed and in my judgment, our failure to do more puts at risk the safety and security of our citizens each and every day.

Finally, Mr. Chairman on *SBI*net. Hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money so far has been wasted. There has been a lack of oversight and a lack of accountability. The virtual fence has been a complete failure.

I look forward to hearing from honorable Alan Bersin on this issue, along with border security issues.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

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