

TESTIMONY OF
DOUGLAS C. GILLESPIE, SHERIFF
ON BEHALF OF
MAJOR CITIES' CHIEFS ASSOCIATION,
MAJOR COUNTY SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION
AND
LAS VEGAS METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AD HOC SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE, LOCAL AND PRIVATE SECTOR
PREPAREDNESS AND INTEGRATION
UNITED STATES SENATE

Chairman Pryor, Ranking Member Ensign, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: Today I speak for both the Major City Chiefs of Police, representing the 56 largest cities in the Nation, as well as the Major County Sheriffs, representing the top 100 counties. We protect the majority of the American people and have authority in every major urban area. To exemplify the coordination between Chiefs and Sheriffs, I serve as both Chair of the Homeland Security Committee for Major Cities, and I was elected Vice President of the Major County Sheriffs.

I am the Sheriff of the largest law enforcement agency in the State of Nevada: the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. Because Las Vegas is home to many of the world's largest hotels, and a major center of international tourism and entertainment, my jurisdiction is continuously mentioned by our enemy as a potential target.

The Southern Nevada Counter-Terrorism Center: An All Crimes, All Hazards Approach

To counter this well-established threat, we have created the Southern Nevada Counter-Terrorism Center (SNCTC), which embraces the "all crimes, all hazards" doctrine. Within the SNCTC we house the three components necessary to identify, prevent and react to crime and terrorism: Investigation, Analysis and Response.

The SNCTC is comprised of thirteen different agencies, representing Federal, State and local government. Law enforcement is not the only discipline included in the SNCTC. Fire Service, Emergency Medical Service, Emergency Management, and Public Health are also contributing partners within the SNCTC. These dedicated professionals endeavor to maintain a constant situational awareness of our community, sensitive to any crime trends, epidemiological outbreaks, and indicators of potential terrorist activity. Our connectivity with the Federal Intelligence Community is achieved through embedded

personnel from the FBI and DHS, and the information sharing systems that each agency brings into the SNCTC.

Including the Private Sector in Terrorism Prevention

In our community, there are over 6,700 private security professionals, and thousands more valet attendants, housekeepers, and bell captains, each poised and capable of detecting suspicious behaviors indicating criminal activity. We are working to harness this incredible force multiplier. We recognize and completely understand the concerns of the civil liberties community regarding the integration of the private sector into a Fusion Center. Steps will have to be made to prevent the exposure of sensitive information to private sector employees, and to ensure there is no competitive advantage to one commercial enterprise at the expense of others.

To supplement and enhance this “ground level” suspicious activity reporting, we are participating in the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative (NSI) as a pilot city. The NSI, inspired by the Los Angeles Police Department and spearheaded by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Homeland Security, focuses on two things: 1) the collection of objective, observable behaviors known to be indicators of criminal or terrorist activity; 2) the sharing of this information – absent personally identifiable information – with other law enforcement agencies.

Preventing School Violence

At the SNCTC, information is shared vertically between the Local, State and Federal partners, as well as horizontally among our partner agencies in state and local government and the private sector. In February 2008, fifteen-year-old Christopher Privett was gunned down while walking home from high school in broad daylight. While the offenders were ultimately caught and are currently awaiting trial, we looked for ways to better utilize our existing resources to prevent future violence surrounding our schools. Through a partnership with the Clark County School District Police Department (CCSDPD), we have a CCSDPD employee embedded in the SNCTC. This partnership typifies the ideals of horizontal information sharing.

This capability to share information horizontally, as discussed above, is critical to the success of the "all crimes, all hazards" Fusion Center approach to policing. In my organization I have gang, drug and anti-crime task forces located throughout my community. When the incident described above occurred, that information was shared with all of these geographically dispersed task forces, they each provided the resources they had at their disposal to ensure that the alleged suspects were identified, located and arrested. This same Horizontal information flow has been critical to use in sharing information related to de-confliction of narcotics investigations and officer safety information related to marijuana grows and clandestine lab operations.

Embracing the Intelligence-led Policing Philosophy

Within the SNCTC, we have a robust analytical group that focuses on traditional criminal activity and crime patterns. These crime analysts scour raw crime data looking for patterns and trends, as well as any social causative factors. On a weekly basis, the leaders of my department meet to discuss these findings, and discuss the options available to address these crime issues. Innovative initiatives inspired and driven by the crime data and actionable intelligence are the foundation of our intelligence-led policing strategy. Because criminals don't restrict their activities according to certain jurisdictional boundaries, we look at crime analysis and problem solving from a regional perspective. Police leaders from my agency and all of the agencies within Southern Nevada convene periodically to share our thoughts on the crime data and resultant policing strategies.

Narcotics Trafficking and Associated Violence

Las Vegas has long been considered the "crossroads" for narcotics traffickers between the suppliers in Central and South America and the consumers in the United States. As the site of a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) task force, we are on the front lines of the war on drugs. With drug trafficking comes the associated violence. In October of last year, we found out just how ruthless drug traffickers can be.

Six-year-old Cole Puffinberger was inside of his home in Las Vegas when armed intruders posing as police officers snatched him away from his mother. My detectives quickly learned that young Cole was likely abducted because his grandfather owed a Mexican drug cartel several million dollars. As detectives worked to locate the young boy, special agents from the FBI and DEA worked feverishly to learn more about the abductors and their criminal organization. Crime and intelligence analysts collected cell phone and surveillance data, and passed the information on to investigators. An AMBER alert was issued to increase public visibility, and every effort was focused on keeping Cole within the borders of the United States.

The intensity and tenaciousness of the investigators paid off when Cole was recovered unharmed four days later, abandoned by his kidnapers presumably because of the massive public awareness campaign. Two Mexican nationals have been charged by the United States Attorney for conspiracy to kidnap a child. One of these suspects had been previously deported from the United States in 1998, 2003 and 2006.¹

Through information provided by the Rocky Mountain Information Network (RMIN) of which my organization is a member, we had become aware of the increase in narcotics related kidnaps/extortions occurring in the Phoenix and Tucson areas of the Southwest Border, this information was received prior to the incident. The Southern Nevada Counterterrorism Center (SNCTC) had been in contact with the Arizona Counter Terrorism Intelligence Center (ACTIC) to learn what information the ACTIC possessed related to investigative challenges that were encountered during these incidents. The ACTIC, through its member agencies, provided points of contact for investigators from

¹ Haynes, B. *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, Feb 25, 2009. Found at www.lvrj.com/news/40274937.html

Southern Nevada to speak with their counterparts. The ACTIC further provided border violence briefing material, which substantially increased law enforcement in Southern Nevada's understanding of challenges to successfully bringing these types of incidents to a safe resolution.

The Role of DHS in Combating Drug Trafficking Violence

Because Fusion Centers are the heart of Federal, State and Local information sharing efforts, we urge the distinguished members of this Subcommittee to consider this when contemplating the role of the Department of Homeland Security in countering violence related to drug trafficking. We would like to have these information channels in place and firmly entrenched within the Fusion Centers, so that we can react quickly and effectively when violence related to narcotics trafficking occurs in our community

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has a number of agencies under its control which have a statutory responsibility for the counter-narcotics mission. It is critical to the nation's security that the efforts of these various agencies are coordinated with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), who has primary statutory authority for the counter-narcotics mission, to ensure that scarce resources are not squandered. The roles of the respective federal entities that are tasked with this mission have overlap and in some cases redundancies. Neither are in themselves a negative; they do however require coordination at the federal level. The important aspect of this, I believe, is to ensure that the respective agencies are focusing their efforts on what it is they do best and are best situated to address.

To further enhance our counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism capabilities, we in Las Vegas are considering the options available to us to improve the coordination between the SNCTC and the Las Vegas HIDTA task force. Among the options are: exchanges of intelligence analysts, relocating the investigative and operational de-confliction function into the SNCTC, and the possible future co-location of the SNCTC and the Las Vegas HIDTA task force.

On behalf of the Major Cities' Chiefs Association and the Major County Sheriff's Association, I thank this distinguished subcommittee for the opportunity to share our views.