



EXTRAORDINARY SKIES.  
UNCOMMON GROUND.

## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

April 21, 2023

U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management  
Senator Kyrsten Sinema, Chair

Dear Senator Sinema and Members of the Subcommittee,

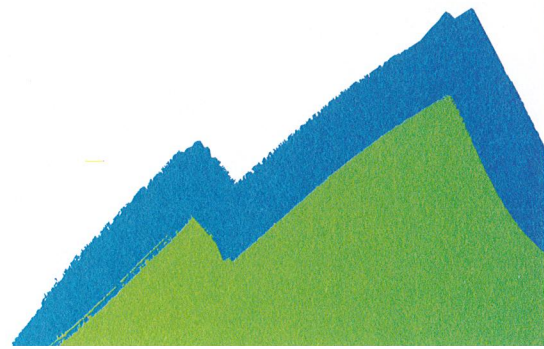
I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee regarding the issues that our city is having from a mayor and community leader perspective.

I have served the people of Sierra Vista as mayor for four months and prior to that, retired as a Combat Service-Disabled Veteran of the U.S. Army at Fort Huachuca located in Sierra Vista in southwestern Cochise County, Arizona. Additionally, I will submit my view is also of a father, husband, mentor, and Pastor.

Sierra Vista, Arizona has a population of about 45,000 and is located about 20 miles from the U.S. Border with Mexico. Sierra Vista doesn't feel much like a border town. It's a military community home to the Army installation Fort Huachuca, which is the home of the Buffalo Soldier. It has a diverse, well-traveled population, who have settled there often by choice to enjoy a quiet, safe lifestyle with a wealth of outdoor recreational opportunities. I would like to say it's the best city in the country and I stand by that remark!

The nearest Port of Entry is 45 miles away at Naco and it's rare for the dangerous border issues you sometimes read about to impact Sierra Vista. In fact, some of the national rhetoric on border issues makes it harder for us to attract visitors and businesses to our city because people assume the area is more dangerous than it really is. I don't want to add to any false perceptions about violent crime in our community.

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But a recent trend of young people being recruited as so-called “load car drivers” does pose a very real danger to our residents and visitors, which fuels those narratives about violence near the border. Often using social media, cartels in Mexico recruit residents in the U.S. to travel to the border, pick up migrants (whom the cartels refer to as “loads”), and transport them north in exchange for money. Sierra Vista lies in the path of most of these load car drivers, who need to travel through our community to proceed north. In 2020 the Sierra Vista Police Department responded to 19 vehicle pursuits in our City. In 2022 that total doubled to 38, with an additional 18 pursuits where the SVPD responded to assist other agencies.

These load car drivers, who are often teenagers or young adults, are encouraged to drive recklessly through town to discourage pursuit. This has created extremely dangerous situations to include a load car driver speeding through an elementary school zone and crashing into a bicyclist, which was close to my mother’s home. Two other incidents resulted in serious accidents at major intersections in town, while one that occurred north of the City ended in a fatality.

The Sierra Vista Police Department has seen an increase in felony case submissions to the county attorney’s office from 343 in 2020 to 588 in 2022, a 71% increase. I want to reiterate that this increase does not all stem from violent crimes some may fear plague communities near the border, but a significant amount is tied to the surge in incidents related to load car drivers. These incidents also tie up a significant amount of SVPD’s limited manpower.

I grew up in Sierra Vista and graduated from the local high school, Buena High School (go Colts!). And I have since raised my family in this extraordinary community. It is a wonderful place to call home.

But recently I have felt worried for my family members’ safety in a way I never have had to think about before. I have a sixteen-year-old daughter who is a novice driver. I have encouraged family members to avoid the major highways running through town and stick to local streets because I know these load car drivers pose a very real threat to their safety. I have also advised my mother to stay off the roadways because earlier this year the high-speed pursuit where the load car driver sped through a school zone, hit, and severely injured a bicyclist ended about 200 feet from her residence. I am also a Pastor of a church in Sierra Vista, and I have advised my parishioners to always be alert of their surroundings and again try to stay off the major highways as well.

I am not alone in feeling this way as my citizens have witnessed the reckless, dangerous behavior of these drivers and many others have seen the headlines about the damage and harm they have caused. One incident that will forever be etched in my mind was an incident in 2022 when a sixteen-year-old was evading the police and failed to stop at a red light. The driver struck a 65-year-old mother, “Ms. Wanda”, who was on her way to have a birthday dinner with her son. When she did not show up at the restaurant, her son decided to search for his mom at her residence and passed by the accident. When he arrived at her house, he was informed that she was involved in the accident that he passed, and she unfortunately passed away from her injuries. I don’t want this to happen to any more of my citizens. I want to stop worrying about if my

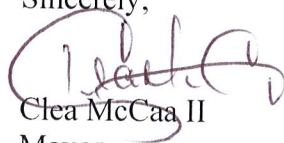
April 21, 2023

Page 3

daughter might make it home from volleyball practice. I want to stop worrying about who will be the next victim of tragedy because of load car drivers who have no regard for human life.

I will leave you with this final statement. I serve the citizens of Sierra Vista to keep them safe; enhance their Quality of Life; and support our Law Enforcement and First Responders. Today I urge you to take immediate action on this matter by approving legislation to combat the cartel's recruitment activity on social media. It's a matter of the utmost importance to my community's future prosperity and to the safety of the extraordinary people who call Sierra Vista home. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Clea McCaa II", written over a circular stamp or seal.

Clea McCaa II  
Mayor