Opening Statement by Senator Scott P. Brown

May 20, 2010

Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight

U.S. Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee

"Counternarcotics Contracting in Latin America."

As Ranking Member of this subcommittee, it is again an honor to join with Chairman McCaskill in exploring the important issues of this subcommittee. Issues that go to the core of how our government conducts business. I look forward to finding ways our government can fulfill its missions better, more efficiently, and most importantly with fewer taxpayer dollars.

This is a critical issue for the United States as we are confronted by the effects of the narcotics trade in this country every day -- from the increasing violence perpetrated by Mexican drug trafficking organizations, to the seemingly endless flow of narcotics that enters the U.S. and ruins young lives. The narcotics trade also has profound and devestating effects on the countries that produce or serve as transit points to the United States market. These countries endure escalating violence at the hands of organized criminal gangs. Gangs that destabilize and threaten the rule of law, hampering legitimate economic growth. Unfortunately, I am all too aware of the societal effects of the illicit drug trade. In my own state of Massachusetts, llegal drugs pose a significant threat to the safety and welfare of our citizens. Local treatment providers and law enforcement officers regard cocaine as the most serious drug threat in the state due to its highly addictive nature and its direct link to violent crime. Colombian drug trafficking organizations dominate the heroin and cocaine markets in Massachusetts. Just last month Boston law enforcement authorities concluded a two year investigation and arrested the kingpin of a drug trafficking syndicate that brought in as much as $100,000 worth of cocaine **per week** from Colombia into the Boston area.

The U.S. has led the "International War on Drugs" for a long time and it certainly has been expensive. From 1980 to 2008 the United States has spent roughly **$13.1 billion** on anti-drug initiatives in Latin America. It is imperative that Congress ask prior to the expenditure of precious taxpayer dollars what the objectives are for the U.S. counternarcotics strategy in Latin America and what performance measures Congress can use to track this spending. These performance measures should be transparent and allow the taxpayers as well as Congress to hold the Government Agencies, contractors and our partner nations accountable.

In the last ten years our two most prominent counternarcotics efforts have been ***Plan Colombia*** and the ***Merida Initiative***. Plan Colombia was designed as a comprehensive strategy to strengthen democratic institutions; combat drug trafficking and terrorism; promote human rights and the rule of law; and foster economic development. While the the Mérida initiative seeks to break the power of criminal organizations and strengthen border control by bolstering anti-drug and anti-crime initiatives in Mexico and Centrail America.

We should give credit where credit is due -- Plan Colombia has achieved some notable success in improving the security conditions in Colombia. It remains to be seen whether the Merida Initiative will achieve the same kinds of results, but with more that $1.5 billion of taxpayer funds on the line Congress will be watching closely.

Our long history in counternarcotics activities in Latin America provides a basis to relate "Lessons Learned" from our success to other key strategic counternarcotics missions like Afghanistan. As the witnesses are aware, despite a reduction over the last two years, Afghanistan cultivated more than 123,000 hectares of poppy last year, supplying 90 percent of the world's opium. According to the UNODC, the Taliban receive more than $150 million per year from the opium trade -- more than enough money to continue funding their deadly fight against US troops and the Karzai government. My hope is that we can duplicate the successful parts of our Colombia strategy and prevent Afghanistan from becoming a narco-state

The United States is again at a critical juncture in its counternarcotics strategy. Today, Mexican President Calderon will address a joint session of Congress to reaffirm our strong bond and discuss the unprecedented level of drug-fueled violence at our shared border – violence that threatens to spill over into the U.S. I applaud President Calderon's courage in standing up to the drug lords that threaten the very existence of his country. In Afghanistan the challenges are even more daunting. The Afghan heroin trade undermines every aspect of society and remains one of the key obstacles for troop withdrawal.

As a backdrop to these immense challenges around the world and the demand for U.S. assistance we have a growing national debt that is approaching $13 trillion. This is why we must be very clear about what our counternarcotics objectives are and what performance measures we should be holding our government agencies to. Today one of the areas we will examine is what what role should support 'contractors' play in pursuing these objectives. In my short tenure on this subcommittee I have learned that while contractor involvement may be necessary and appropriate in some situations, the government must always be exacting and relentless in its oversight responsibilities to ensure that the taxpayer is getting what was contracted for at a fair price.

I look forward to discussing these critical issues with our witnesses today.