

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
APRIL 7, 2011

Thank you for calling this hearing today. I believe that it is appropriate that we hear from our state and local officials that work every day to secure their communities along the southern border.

The deadly violence in Mexico has fundamentally changed the jobs of law enforcement along the border. They are now asked not only to serve eviction notices, assist courthouses with the transport of prisoners and execute and service process of civil litigation matter; but also to serve as our nation's first line of defense in defending our homeland. The job of sheriff or sheriff's deputy is more difficult, more challenging and more dangerous than ever before. And unfortunately, this is a direct result of the Federal Government's inability or unwillingness to secure our borders.

I am sure that all of you are aware of the challenges that Arizona has been facing – many of your communities face the same problems – and understand why many people in southern Arizona feel like they are living in a no-man's-land, abandoned by the Federal government and this Administration.

Regardless of some administration officials claims that, "the border itself is more under control than it has ever been," Border Patrol in the Tucson sector apprehends over 500 illegal border crossers each day, and over 210,000 illegal border crossers were apprehended last year. According to estimates from border patrol agents, only one-third to one-fifth of illegal border crossers are actually apprehended. I don't think anyone living in the region would consider this to be a border that is 'under control.'

Americans living anywhere, but especially along the border, must feel safe and secure in their homes and on their property. They cannot while close to a million illegal border crossers, many with criminal records, enter through the southwest each year.

With an increase in illegal border crossers and an increase in Mexican drug cartel violence, we have seen record amounts of drugs crossing the border. Ninety percent of the cocaine seized in the United State comes through Mexico and much of it is smuggled though Arizona, Texas, New Mexico and California to points throughout the country. Arizona leads the southwest border states in the seizure of marijuana with nearly 1.7 million pounds of marijuana being seized last year in Arizona (with 1.2 million of those pounds being seized in the Tucson sector), a 43% increase from 2008. No other border sector has ever reached the one million pound threshold.

But, these drug seizures do not affect only southwest border law enforcement. The drug smuggling operations are active in more than 230 U.S. cities and every region of our country. Drug smuggling through our borders is reported to generate as much as \$38 billion annually in revenues for the Mexican drug cartels.

As many of the witnesses have noted in their written testimony, there are a number of key programs still in need of funding that are critical to our border security. Congress has not provided nearly enough funding for Operation Streamline to assist in prosecuting illegal border crossers, or Operation Stonegarden, a grant program that funds many of the activities sheriffs are asked to take on to help defend our homeland. These programs are crucial to ensuring our courts and state and local law enforcement have the resources necessary to support efforts to protect people in the border region and beyond.

Again, thank you for being here today and most importantly, thank you for all you do to keep Americans safe and secure each and every day. I will continue to work each day to support your efforts to secure our homeland and serve our country.

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