

Opening Statement of John Ensign
Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery and Intergovernmental Affairs,
“Exploring Drug Gangs’ Ever Evolving Tactics to Penetrate the Border and the Federal
Government’s Ability to Stop Them”
March 31, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this very important hearing. Thank you to our witnesses who have taken the time out of their busy schedules to testify today.

I would also like to thank all the men and women who work very hard, 24/7, every day of the year, to secure our borders. Those who work at our nation’s air-, land- and seaports, those who are on foreign postings, those who work in our nation’s interior; whether in uniform or plainclothes; whether they are from ICE or CBP or DEA or other federal, state or local agencies; they all deserve our sincere appreciation for doing a tough job very well.

Some of these officers have made the ultimate sacrifice. From decades past we recall the service of DEA Special Agent Enrique “Kiki” Camarena. In recent years, we mourned the loss of Border Patrol Agents Robert Rosas and Brian Terry. And now, in just the past few months, we suffered the loss of ICE Special Agent Jaime Zapata. All served their nation well, and we can best honor them by taking up their fallen standard and continuing, and ultimately finishing, their work of securing our borders.

We will discuss today various tactics used by the drug and alien smugglers to achieve their goals. From disguising illegal aliens as U.S. Marines in uniform and traveling in vehicles masquerading as official U.S. Government transports, to using submarines and small boats to haul dope up our coasts, to crafting elaborate tunnels underneath our borders that bring illegal aliens and dangerous narcotics and other contraband into our country, the drug and alien smugglers will stop at nothing.

The situation at our southern border is, without a doubt, very critical to our current and future security. According to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), in its 2010 study, the calendar year 2009 saw an increase in the availability of heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana smuggled over our southern border.

The insidious reach of the Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO), across our southern border and into our communities is not limited strictly to the border area through which they peddle their drugs with deadly results. Again according to the NDIC, Mexican DTOs are the only DTOs active in every region of the United States, including the states of every member of this subcommittee.

The DTOs’ reach has even arrived here, in our nation’s capital. The Washington Post reported recently that the D.C. Metro Police and Special Agents from ICE/Homeland Security Investigations arrested eight suspects believed to be connected with Mexico’s La Familia drug

cartel, whose objective was to expand their operation in this District and the surrounding area. This multi-city investigation netted over \$5 million worth of crystal meth alone.

Just as ominous, the Mexican DTOs, according to reports, have expanded their relationship with street and prison gangs in the United States and have increased their distribution of illegal drugs into more rural and suburban areas.

This drug trade has brought enormous revenues to the DTOs. Tens of billions of dollars are smuggled from the United States through the southwest border into Mexico.

This blood money helps the DTOs tempt some of our officers on the border to forsake their oaths to uphold the law in return for private gain. We know, however, that these dirty few are just a small microcosm of the total workforce, and the vast majority is truly the rule to their exception.

The end result is that innocent people have gotten caught up in the violence. The Mexican government reported recently that over 34,000 people have been killed in their country in drug war-related deaths since 2007. Considering that last year's total of 15,273 deaths marked a 59% increase, the numbers, unfortunately, are still going up.

The violence has also occurred in our country. Drug and alien smugglers have kidnapped innocent people to further their objectives and have emboldened street gangs to become more violent, thus placing more of our brave law enforcement officers and ourselves in greater danger.

This is a battle that we must win. We must win it because the drugs and violence threaten individuals and communities across our nation. We must win it because we need secure borders to ensure our national security. And we must win it on behalf of those who already have made the ultimate sacrifice in this fight.

I again thank our witnesses who will testify today and I look forward to their testimony.