

**OPENING REMARKS AND WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF**

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**BEFORE THE**

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

**COMMITTEE ON**

**HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**HEARING ON**

**“FENCING ALONG THE SOUTHWEST BORDER”**

**APRIL 4, 2017**

**Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill and distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored and humbled to be invited to testify today before the committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs regarding “Fencing Along the Southwest Border.”**

**I will describe some of my experience and knowledge of the history of tactical infrastructure, also known as fences and barriers, pertaining to the international boundary between the United States of America and Mexico.**

**Thirty-five years ago, in southeastern Arizona, I was building border fence with a post hole digging tool, a wire-stretching tool, a heavy coil of barbed wire and a good pair of leather gloves. Alone, and with no backup, my partner and I dug post holes and strung wire in Douglas, Arizona, standing inches away from Mexico.**

**Three or four strands of barbed wire would not halt people from crossing, or stop smugglers from defeating our efforts with a simple pair of wire cutters. But, it marked the border; our “line in the sand.”**

**We’ve come a long way since the days of steel posts and strings of barbed wire. In 1995, a U.S. Army construction battalion replaced expanded metal and chain link fencing in another Arizona border town, where I found myself in command, at the time. That year, we arrested an astounding 116,000 illegal aliens in that one station’s area of responsibility. Countless tens of thousands made it past our sparsely staffed “thin green line.”**

**Then, 9-11-2001 came. After the horrendous, deadly attacks on American soil by foreign born terrorists, the American people strongly communicated to Congress, the Administration, and the media that they wanted our nation protected at our borders.**

**In 2005, I found myself serving as the Chief of the Yuma Border Patrol Sector, a stretch of the border that spanned southwestern Arizona and southeastern California.**

**About 450 Agents covered the approximate 125 mile border with Mexico in the Yuma area, working overlapping 8 to 12 hour rotations, 24-seven.**

**During my first year as Chief of Yuma, we arrested over 138,000 foreign nationals attempting to cross our border from Mexico. They crossed under the cover of darkness, and during broad daylight. They crossed in vast and overwhelming numbers, into Yuma, and were led by unscrupulous smugglers across the Colorado River, remote desert and towering rocky mountain ridges, where summer temperatures can push upwards of 120 degrees.**

**We seized nearly 36,000 pounds of drugs driven or backpacked into the USA, and there were over 200 attacks by border bandits that year. We counted eighteen hundred victims, mostly from Mexico. The criminal gangs and lone bandits from Mexico preyed on their own; robbing, raping and murdering fellow countrymen, women and children, who were staging to enter, or during the act of crossing the border. Frequently, the guides acted in concert with the bandits, sharing in “the take.” Assaults on border law enforcement personnel numbered in the hundreds. Yuma had become the most violent stretch of the border.**

**So, in response to this, Yuma Sector became the “proof of concept” that America can protect and control its border, when the proper mix of resources are placed almost instantaneously. The Secretary of Homeland Security prudently, and thoughtfully exercised his legislated waiver authority in consideration of certain environmental regulations which posed a hindrance to construction initiatives.**

**Nine hundred men and women of the National Guard, supporting Operation Jump Start, descended upon the border in the Yuma area. We built border barriers –fence—along the entire stretch of the border in Yuma Sector. The Army Corps of Engineers, and contractors built double pedestrian fencing; vehicle barriers, and what is known as “floating fence” in the Imperial Sand Dunes. The style and materiel used depended on the geographic and demographic challenges. We doubled the Border Patrol Agent manpower, and added additional sensor and communications technology.**

**Violent bandit activity went from the record 200 attacks and over 1,800 victims the year before, to zero, after fence. The number of violent assaults on Border Patrol Agents also declined drastically.**

**Before fence: Yuma Border Patrol recorded 2,706 known “drive-throughs” in a one year period. This is where smugglers load up vehicles with their contraband of drugs and people, and simply drive across the open, unfettered border, and cross the river in shallow places, destroying wilderness landscape along the way. They lose themselves in urban areas and traffic once reaching paved roads. Of the 2,706 drive-throughs, we recorded a mere 13 captures and turn backs. The rest all got away, with no idea what or who they brought in.**

**After fence: Only six vehicles attempted to enter, at other than a designated port of entry. None got away – we captured or turned back all of them. From 2,706, down to six. Impressive results.**

**By 2008, Yuma Sector arrests of illicit border crossers and traffickers had dwindled from over 138,000 down to 8,363. The known attempts to enter and the got-aways dwindled to an equally minimal number compared to the hundreds of thousands that entered and evaded arrest in previous years.**

**I encourage you to ask the Border Patrol Agents in the field. They know. I recently completed a comprehensive tour of the border in south Texas, receiving robust “state of the border” updates from some of the Border Patrol Chiefs and their staffs. I have spoken with the majority of Border Patrol leadership covering the Southwestern states in recent days.**

**Bottom line: when I ask them about fence, every one of them responds: “Yes, build new barriers, where needed; improve existing fence, and maintain timely repairs when breached by criminals, or damaged by the elements.”**

**Threats change; the transnational criminal organizations will not simply go away. They try methods to defeat the fence, but it persistently impedes their ease of entry and ability to quickly ingress into border communities and the interior of the United States. It gives the protectors of our borders the time to detect and respond to the illegal activity. It preserves the environment in the border wild lands.**

**This system-of-systems approach, implemented broadly and rapidly is what makes tactical infrastructure, border fence, so valuable as part of the solution.**

**Thank you, esteemed Members of this Committee. God bless the men and women of the U.S. Border Patrol.**

**I remain ready to continue a dialogue regarding this topic.**

