

**Sheriff Sigifredo Gonzalez, Jr.**  
**Zapata County, Texas**  
**Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition**

Tuesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006

Written Testimony on

*“Armed and Dangerous: Confronting the Problem of Border Incursions”*

Before the

House Committee on Homeland Security

Subcommittee on Investigations

Mr. Chairman and Members of this Subcommittee, it is an honor and a privilege to be invited to appear before this subcommittee to discuss incursions and other problems along the border of Texas and the Republic of Mexico. Unfortunately, because of medical reasons I am not able to appear before you today. The Honorable Leo Samaniego, Sheriff of El Paso County, Texas, and Vice-Chairman of the Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition, will take my place.

On April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005, I sent out letters to my 15 colleagues whose counties border the Republic of Mexico. In my letter to them I invited them to a meeting to discuss unique problems that we face along the border. This was done out of frustration in what I felt was the inadequacy of our federal government to protect our border in preventing a potential terrorist from entering our country. I felt that as a citizen of this great country, our almost 2,000 miles of border was very porous, that many people whose intentions were unknown were coming into our country to perhaps commit acts in our own country similar to or worse than what happened on September 11, 2001. All of us expressed the same frustration since we had mentioned this many times to federal and state legislators. We felt that perhaps speaking as one voice we would be heard.

On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005, we met in Laredo, Texas. As a result we formed the Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition. The first and foremost priority of our coalition is protecting all residents of this country against a terrorist act without regard to race, sex, or ethnic origin. We continue to believe that many persons have entered our country with intentions of harming us. We are sincere when we tell you that we are not blaming the agents of the United States Border Patrol but, rather, we criticize the policies that they have to adhere to.

I do want to make you aware that the experience of the member sheriffs of this coalition total almost 460 years including 101 years of experience as sheriffs. The oldest serving sheriff of this coalition is El Paso County Sheriff Samaniego with 22 years. I have attached the list of member sheriffs of the coalition with their years of experience and have marked it as Attachment #1.

I have been asked to briefly relate to you some of the problems that we have encountered along the border, specifically the violence along the border and incursions, among other matters. Most of the sheriffs that have encountered these problems are present to answer any questions you may have as they relate to their counties.

The areas of Val Verde and Maverick Counties, specifically, continue to see many persons from countries other than Mexico entering the country and being let loose in these sheriffs' counties. Sheriffs A. D'Wayne Jernigan and Tomas Herrera were very concerned with these persons since it was not known how many potential special interest aliens were being released into our great country with what we term as a "notice to disappear". We did not know what diseases, if any, these persons may have had. These persons, when released, would trek into town through day care centers and schools. After Sheriff Herrera complained of this practice, Border Patrol, through no fault of their own, would transport them to bus stations. They were being used as taxis. These illegal immigrants would photograph themselves and send the pictures back to their respective countries to show that they had made it to America. The photograph shows them holding their "permission" papers. I have attached one such photograph and marked it as Attachment #2.

All of us are concerned that the border with Mexico is being used as the front door to this country. Most of the illegal immigrants from countries of special interest that are apprehended are apprehended along the southwest border. I have attached these lists and have marked them as Attachment #3.

Through intelligence information we have also learned that several murders in Laredo, Webb County, Texas, have been orchestrated by members of drug cartels operating in both countries. These drug cartel enforcers cross the Rio Grande River, commit their murders in the United States, then head back to Mexico, again, via the Rio Grande River. We have all seen in the media the reports of the murders in Nuevo Laredo, 24 so far in the first 36 days of 2006. These murders are connected to organizations in both Mexico and the United States. A Task Force in Laredo last week confiscated IEDs and other items used to make explosive devices. Border Patrol agents and deputy sheriffs are shot at from Mexico on a routine basis. Just two weeks ago there was a sniper in Mexico shooting at agents that were working along the banks of the river in the area of the cities of Rio Bravo/El Cenizo. This continued, sporadically, for three days. Agents reported seeing several individuals wearing military style uniforms on a hill on the Mexican side, one of them was using what was believed to be a high powered rifle with scope.

The Rio Grande Valley, Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr Counties, have continuous problems with pseudo-cops coming from Mexico to extort and kidnap citizens in these counties. This area is the fastest growing area in the nation. They have seen their share of terrorist activity as it relates to the migration of many members of ruthless gangs that come into this country for reasons other than legitimate employment. Sometime last year, a woman was taken off an airplane at the McAllen, Texas, airport. She had come in from Mexico, through the river, as her clothes were still wet, and had a passport from it is my understanding, Africa. She was from a special interest country and had come in to Mexico using a passport from a friendly country to avoid detection. Who knows what her intentions were. Thanks to an officer at the airport she was taken off the plane.

During this same time period, a high-ranking member of the *Mara Salvatrucha*, or MS-13, was apprehended in the Brooks County area, also in south Texas. He had entered the country illegally. This MS-13 member is believed to have been responsible for the killing of close to 30 persons, or more, in a bus explosion in his native country. It is my understanding that he had a lengthy criminal record in the United States. This person, as many others, find it very easy to come into our country through a very porous, wide-open, and unprotected border.

We have received information that the cartels immediately across our border are planning on killing as many police officers as possible on the United States side. This is being planned for the purpose of attempting to “scare us” away from the border. They have the money, equipment, and stamina to do it. They are determined to save their “load”. It is very possible, these cartels may form a nexus with members of Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. The Department of Homeland Security recently issued Officer Alerts warning their agents of the potential threats. We, the local officers, learned about it through the news media.

The cartels operating in Mexico and the United States have demonstrated that the weapons they possess can and will be used in protecting their caches. One informant familiar with the operations of this cartel mentioned to us that the weapons we use are water guns compared to what we will have to come up against if we ever have to. I have attached photographs showing some of the weapons that these cartels possess. The photos have been marked as Attachment #4.

Local, state, and federal officers have found many items along the banks of the Rio Grande River that indicate possible ties to terrorist organizations or members of military units of Mexico. Currency, clothing, are common finds. Recently, a jacket with patches was found in Jim Hogg County, Texas, by agents of U. S. Border Patrol. The patches on the jacket show an Arabic military badge with one depicting an airplane flying over a building and heading towards a tower, and another showing an image of a lion's head with wings and a parachute emanating from the animal (lion). It is believed from an undisclosed document that Department of Homeland Security translators concluded that the patches read "defense center", "minister of defense", or "defense headquarters". The bottom of one patch read "martyr", "way to eternal life" or "way to immortality".

On January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006, USBP Chief David Aguilar was asked by a reporter from KGNS television station in Laredo, Texas, what the outcome of the investigation of the jacket was. Chief Aguilar responded that the patches were not from Al Qaeda but from countries Al Qaeda was known to operate. He also stated that the investigation was turned over to the proper authorities who had already concluded their investigation. He knew nothing further.

On February 2<sup>nd</sup> of this year, one of my deputies discovered an 18" duffel bag approximately 8 miles North of Zapata by the highway right of way. This duffel bag had "Armada de Mexico" embroidered on the bag. Inside the bag were several items that are commonly used by persons that are knowledgeable in bodybuilding, in staying in good physical shape, and used to physical exertion. Inside the bag, a bus ticket with an origin of Veracruz, Mexico was found. Although I am not insinuating that the person carrying this bag was a member or former member of the Mexican Navy, but there is a naval academy in Veracruz. I have attached photographs of the duffel bag and marked it as Attachment #5.

Employees of our offices have also seen incursions into this country of persons dressed in battle dress uniforms (BDUs), carrying what officers believe to be automatic weapons, very clean cut, and in very good physical condition. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005, several officers assigned to do surveillance by the Rio Grande River by the Zapata/Webb County line observed approximately 20-25 persons dressed as indicated above walking on a gravel road, coming from the area of the riverbanks, marching in a cadence. The deputy observed these individuals through his borrowed night vision goggles. These individuals were carrying large duffel bags and walking two abreast. They also had backpacks.

In the town site of Zapata, residents are always reporting individuals getting off boats. These individuals also wear BDUs, backpacks, and possess weapons. The residents describe them as soldiers.

The Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition is very concerned of the very unique problems along our border. Border Patrol is doing the best they can with the resources that are available to them. Immediate help is needed for them and for the protection of our country. We have implemented Operation Linebacker, a second line of defense in the protection of our country. The problems along the border are federal problems. Our governor, the Honorable Rick Perry, could not wait for a peace officer to get killed along the border. He, just as we, are very much concerned. He has appropriated \$6 million for us to start the operation. Just last week he announced an additional \$3.8 million that he will grant our coalition. The problems along the border will continue unless our federal government does something about it soon. Must we wait until an officer gets killed or until after another terrorist act? We don't want to come back and tell you "we told you so" after another terrorist act against our country.

Sheriff Arvin West, Hudspeth County, Texas will testify to other incursions.

I want to express my most sincere appreciation for allowing us the opportunity to appear before you and thank you for the work you do for our country, the United States of America.