

**Testimony
Sheriff Arvin West
Hudspeth County Sheriff's Department**

**Before
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives**

**“Armed and Dangerous: Confronting the
Problem of Border Incursions”
February 7, 2006**

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Mr. Chairman and Committee Members,

My name is Arvin West. I currently hold the office of Sheriff for Hudspeth County, Texas. I have held the office of Sheriff since December 2000. I was born and raised in Sierra Blanca, Texas. I call Hudspeth County my home, and have been acquainted with the border area all my life. I am proud to be an American and will defend this county with all that I can do.

I have been in law enforcement since 1983, and this line of work has been my passion since beginning my career. I have worked along the border with Mexico since I began in law enforcement and I have seen many changes over the years. The level of violence has escalated over the years. The violence we see today along the U.S. and Mexico border, in Texas, has escalated to the use of numerous types of automatic pistols, rifles, and machine guns. The Drug Cartels are protecting their drug shipments better. With the use of a wide open and virtually unsecured border in Texas, terrorism of local citizens, weapons, radios and cell phones, surveillance, more man power, spending more money to change vehicles, and the use of officials from Mexico " Mexican Military, Local Law Enforcement, Federal Law Enforcement", the drug cartels are becoming more efficient at the drug trade. I am concerned that the Drug Cartels will further escalate the violence by the use of explosives. I am concerned that it is just a matter of time that the Drug Cartels will wire their drug loads with explosives and when caught by law enforcement personnel, detonate the load vehicle. The escalation of violence will be carried out with this in mind, "If we can't have the drug loads, no one can". As the Drug Cartels become more advance and better organized they too will have a strategy of deterrence, aimed at law enforcement. Not to mention the fact of having to deal with irate citizens. IE: Minutemen, untrained volunteers working on their own, and vigilantes wanting to take the law into their own hands and secure the border by vigilante force. This is an overwhelming undertaking without the resources needed to do the work. To do the work effectively all law enforcement agencies from the U.S. Border Patrol to the Local Sheriff's Office's need an increase of man power and funding to train, equip, and operate against overwhelming man power and weapons.

Information my officers have received from informants tells us, that the activities of Operation Linebacker and increased law enforcement presence along the Mexico/Hudspeth County border has frustrated the Cartels operating in the area. This activity by the Hudspeth County Sheriff's Office has caused the Cartels to change their

locations, spend more money on load vehicles, scouts and drivers. The frustration the Cartels are feeling has caused them to order that their load drivers be armed. The Cartels also have employed others, such as the Mexican Military to help protect drug loads, which are to cross into the U.S.

The area along the Texas/Mexico border is in Hudspeth County ranges from Mountainous to desert like terrain with an abundance of foliage along the Mexican side of the Rio Grande River. In almost all places the river can be crossed by vehicle or by foot, and only get your ankles wet.

The total miles along the Texas/Mexico border is approximately 1200 miles, which is often rugged terrain. The remote areas along the border tend to give a sanctuary for the Cartels, Mexican Military and others (Terrorist and Illegal Immigrants) who would hide in order to make entry into the U.S. undetected. It is crucial that the local Law Enforcement have additional manpower to confront this escalating activity.

I can only hope and be heard, so that others will recognize that we have a problem with a wide-open and unsecured border between the U.S. and Mexico.

The activity on the part of the drug Cartels has been going on for a long time. I would like to relate to you the latest attempt to cross illegal drugs into the U.S. through Hudspeth County.

On January 23, 2006 my deputies were working information they had gathered that a drug load was to cross into the U.S. near Neely's crossing in the southwestern part of the county. My officers began a surveillance of the area. Because of the use of scouts along the Rio Grande River and all areas where the drug loads are to travel, my officers set up their surveillance along the I-10 corridor, which is about 12 miles from the area where the drug load was to cross. At approximately 2:10 p.m. in the afternoon a Texas DPS Trooper saw three vehicles turning around and cross the median on I-10. The vehicles began travel east bound at a high rate of speed. The DPS Troopers initiated a pursuit of the vehicles at which time my deputies joined the chase. A seizure of approximately 1474 lbs of marijuana and a vehicle was the result of a front tire blow out that rendered the vehicle unable to continue. The Deputies and DPS continued to chase the other two vehicles towards the border. When the Deputies arrived at the border where the drug loads were to cross, the Deputies were met with the Mexican Military in a military Humvee. The Deputies reported seeing heavily armed soldiers in the Humvee. The Deputies took a defensive position while the Humvee and load vehicles crossed back into Mexico. While crossing the Rio Grande River a vehicle became stuck in the river. The Mexican military then flanked the Deputies and DPS in order to protect the load of marijuana that was stuck in the river, The Mexican military spread themselves out to the east and to the west on either side of the vehicle in the river, concealing themselves in the foliage on the Mexico side of the river. The Deputies and DPS officers on the scene, observed as the vehicle was unloaded onto another vehicle. Once the marijuana was unloaded, the vehicle was set on fire and still sits in the river where it was burned.

Efforts to secure the border with the U.S. and Mexico against illegal immigration, drug trafficking, Mexican Military, and terrorism has not been effective thus far. The border between Texas and Mexico has been a significant gateway of these kinds of illegal activities to enter the U.S. If illicit organizations can bring in tons of narcotics through this region and work a distribution network that spans the entire country aided by the Mexican Military, then they can bring in the resources for terrorism as well. If drug Cartels can solicit untrained people to drive across the border undetected and enter this county with illicit products, then what can a well-trained terrorist do?

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members,

I am committed as the Sheriff of Hudspeth County, Texas, to continue to make every effort possible, working with our partners in the Coalition of Sheriff's, Texas State Governors Office, Congress, Senate, and other Law Enforcement Agencies, Local, State, and Federal along our Nations Border with Mexico, to stop, identify and detain any terrorist or components for terrorism before another devastating act is committed in this Country. The issues facing our Nation along the U.S. and Mexico border threatens our very freedom and way of life, one which we have embraced for many years and I hope will continue for many more. I hope that my vocal stance on this issue of "Armed and Dangerous: Confronting the Problem of Border Incursions" will spark debate in our Nation's Capital and around the Country. I hope this debate will fuel ideas and real solutions to this looming problem. I hope that a secure border and a good relationship with our neighbor, on our southern border, will bring the U.S. and Mexico into a prosperous time for us all.

Thank you, for the opportunity to speak before your committee, may God Bless you and this Great Nation we call home.

Sincerely,

Arvin West
Sheriff Hudspeth County
Texas