

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, INVESTIGATIONS & MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

“The U.S. Homeland Security Role in the Mexican War Against Drug Cartels”

10 A.M., Thursday, March 31, 2011

Ranking Member William R. Keating (D-MA) Opening Statement

I would like to thank Chairman McCaul for conducting this hearing and giving us the opportunity to investigate the impact of Mexican Drug Cartel violence on U.S. homeland security. As the Chairman noted, this is our first hearing, and I am looking forward to working with him and our colleagues to tackle the urgent and serious issues challenging the security of this country.

Let me start by expressing my sympathies and gratitude to the family of ICE agent Zapata, who paid the ultimate sacrifice when he was killed last month in the line of duty in Mexico. I wish to also thank Victor Avila who was wounded during the same incident for his service to our Nation. Brave agents like Mr. Zapata and Mr. Avila, along with scores of law enforcement and homeland security officials, work tirelessly to keep this side of the border safe and I truly thank them for their effort.

I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the Secretary Napolitano and the Obama administration, which announced yesterday that the Narcotics Rewards Program would pay \$5 million to anyone coming forward with information that results in the arrest of those responsible for the February 15 attack. I would urge anyone who has information to immediately come forward and let these families have some closure.

Drug related crime in Mexico has been labeled an epidemic, and this hearing will probe further about the reaches of this epidemic. The bottom line is that there has indeed been a sharp rise in drug-related violence in Mexico.

It is my understanding that most of the violence could be construed as a turf battle between rival drug traffickers. The violence is also concentrated. Eighty-four percent of Mexico’s drug-related homicides in 2010 occurred in just four of Mexico’s 32 states; two of which are more than 500 miles from the United States.

One of the questions that is likely to come up today is whether this violence has had a spillover effect on the U.S. side of the border. I see that the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report indicates that crime along the Southwest Border has actually declined steadily over the last ten years – in direct contrast to what has occurred in Mexico.

In fact, in 2009 violent crimes, such as homicides, robberies, assaults and motor vehicle theft decreased in metropolitan areas along the Southwest Border by 4 percent. Homicides were down by 14 percent, robberies 3 percent, assaults by 4 percent and motor vehicle theft by 23 percent. These statistics are important to note—especially because we must continue our vigilant efforts to maintain a low crime rate.

One of our strategies in reducing violence on both sides of the border must address gun trafficking. Inherent in drug violence, is the guns that are used to perpetuate the violence.

I am disappointed that a representative from the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms are not here to testify. I would have appreciated the opportunity to hear about the Fast and Furious Program, which allowed guns over the border so that ATF could track those guns.

It has been reported that one of those guns was used in the shooting of Mr. Zapata and Mr. Avila. There are legitimate questions that require urgent answers about the interplay of guns from the United States and Mexico’s rising violence.

Lastly, I have seen firsthand the damage caused by methamphetamine consumption in my district and I am concerned that as long as the demand exists *here* the violence will continue *there*. As a member of the Addiction, Treatment and Recovery Caucus, I am supportive of the various efforts to reduce the demand for drugs in the United States, and I look forward to working with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to address that issue.

