



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson**

***On the Border and In the Line of Fire: U.S. Law Enforcement, Homeland Security and Drug Cartel Violence***

May 11, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Oversight, Investigations, and Management subcommittee hearing entitled “On the Border and In the Line of Fire: U.S. Law Enforcement, Homeland Security and Drug Cartel Violence”:

“The purpose of this hearing is to determine whether the U.S. has a substantive strategy to control the Southwestern Border and whether that strategy is producing results.

I would first like express my concern about a recent statement made by House Speaker John Boehner regarding immigration reform.

I understand that he plans to oppose any efforts to reform the Nation’s immigration laws before “violence at the border” declines.

As the Committee’s hearings have established, the violence is centered in Mexico.

I am troubled by this violence in our back yard. That’s why I support the Merida and other Federal initiatives to help our neighbor to the South address the violence.

However, I do not see any legitimate reason for the United States to let comprehensive immigration reform fall by the wayside because Mexico is experiencing drug-related violence.

The two should not represent a zero sum equation.

As I have previously stated, a comprehensive border security strategy must create an appropriate mix of personnel, technology and infrastructure.

In recent weeks, U.S. efforts along the Southwestern Border have received a great deal of attention.

In fact, just yesterday, both President Obama and Secretary Napolitano visited El Paso, Texas, to discuss the unprecedented resources that have been dedicated to the Southwestern Border over the past two years.

The U.S. has deployed more resources - personnel, technology and infrastructure - to secure the Southwestern Border than ever before.

There are more than 17,500 Border Patrol agents on the border.

Authority to place up to 1,200 National Guardsmen has been granted.

More than 250 Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Special Agents, investigators, and intelligence analysts are working around the clock to secure our Border and keep illegal goods, narcotics and dangerous individuals from entering the United States.

Their presence deters violent actors from crossing over into our border communities, which are among the safest places to live in the United States.

Legitimate travel and commerce occur between the United States and Mexico and within our border communities on a daily basis.

Including services we trade more than \$1 billion a day with Mexico.

To put this in perspective, we do as much business in goods and services with Mexico in just over a month as Mexico does with all 27 countries of the European Union combined in a year.

As we seek to define a solution to increasing violence in Mexico, we must remain mindful that Mexico is our third-largest trading partner, while the United States ranks first among Mexico's trading partners.

The source for much of the violence in Mexico has been Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs).

The facts indicate that the violence occurring in Mexico is highly concentrated and in many instances limited to drug trafficking corridors, some of which are hundreds of miles away from the United States border.

The facts also indicate that the bulk of this violence occurs between rival DTOs seeking to conquer new turf or within DTOs as lower-level drug dealers seek to rise up within the organization.

Moreover, the facts show that DTOs are motivated by one thing and one thing only: money.

They are not ideologically-based. They do not seek to effectuate political change. They do not organize orchestrated attacks against the government. They only seek to make a profit by any means necessary.

Fortunately, statistics and concrete evidence show that this violence has not spilled over into the United States.

The combined efforts of our Federal government, working alongside State and local law enforcement, have produced real results.

In Fiscal Year 2010, ICE-led efforts along the Southwestern Border resulted in 1,616 criminal arrests, 907 administrative arrests, 868 indictments, 689 convictions, the discovery of two tunnels and the seizure of tons of marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamine.

In the past two years, Customs and Border Protection seized \$147 million in currency at and between ports of entry along the Southwestern Border, in addition to 4.1 million pounds of narcotics.

These results do not negate the violence that is occurring in Mexico; however, they do indicate that current U.S. strategies are improving the safety and security of the United States.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the significant budget cuts proposed by the Republican Majority in its current budget proposal.

This Congress, the Majority passed H.R. 1, which cuts \$350 million from the Department of Homeland Security budget for border security, fencing and technology.

If enacted, these cuts will also reduce the number of border patrol agents on the Southwestern Border.

I would encourage my Republican colleagues to show a real concern for border security by fully funding border security efforts.

Moving us backwards by slashing funds and decreasing our human and financial resources will almost certainly result in a less secure border."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives - Committee on Homeland Security  
H2-117, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515  
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499  
<http://chsdemocrats.house.gov>