

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Taking Down the Cartels: Examining United States-Mexico Cooperation***

April 2, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Taking Down the Cartels: Examining United States – Mexico Cooperation”:

“On the morning of February 22, 2014, drug trafficking boss and leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, Joaquin El Chapo Guzman was captured in Mazatlan, Mexico, a resort town on Mexico’s Pacific Coast. Guzman, who escaped from a Mexican prison by bribing prison officials, had been on the run since 2001.

At the time of his arrest, Guzman was considered the most powerful drug trafficker in the world. Guzman’s arrest was a historic, commendable joint effort between United States authorities—including the Drug Enforcement Administration and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations and Mexican authorities. Guzman’s arrest represents a significant victory in the Mexican drug war that has killed at least seventy thousand people including children. Ironically, his capture was completed without any gunfire.

After Guzman’s arrest, the question remains on where he will be prosecuted and if he will be extradited to the United States. A successful prosecution of Guzman in Mexico could show the world that under President Nieto’s leadership, the Mexican government is committed to taking down the cartels.

However, Guzman is responsible for bringing drugs - including marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamines - into the United States, and there are seven indictments in five different states against him. While we await the Department of Justice’s decision whether or not to seek Guzman’s extradition, we need to evaluate what Guzman’s arrest means for the United States and its cooperation with Mexico to combat drug trafficking organizations and other transnational crimes.

Although the arrest of Guzman is encouraging, we must understand that the “kingpin strategy” of taking down top drug trafficking organization leaders is not likely to address the cartel problem by itself.

Instead, fundamental improvements to Mexico’s law enforcement and judicial systems, economic reforms, and other systemic changes will be necessary. The United States has a vested interest in addressing drug trafficking organizations and their illicit activities in the United States and beyond our borders.

While cartel-related violence has not occurred here in the way it has in Mexico and our border communities remain quite safe, narcotics trafficking and associated criminal activity, including human trafficking and human smuggling, occurs in communities across the United States. Partnering with the Mexicans, where appropriate, to address the cartels can be an effective method of helping to curb cartel-related activity before it crosses our border. The Merida Initiative has provided a means for U.S. support through equipment, training, and technical expertise to our Mexican partners.

Within DHS, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement operates several initiatives aimed at working cooperatively with Mexico to combat the cartels, including operating a Border Enforcement

Security Task Force (BEST) and vetted units within Mexico. U.S.-Mexico security cooperation is essential to addressing the cartels that affect both nations. It is my hope that this Committee continues to find effective ways to support this cooperation.”

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