

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

Border Violence: An Examination of DHS Strategies and Resources

March 11, 2008 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee hearing entitled *Border Violence: An Examination of DHS Strategies and Resources*:

“Fueled in large part by demand for narcotics in the U.S., drug traffickers have crossed our Nation’s southwest border for decades with a “business as usual” mentality.

Sometimes they are caught, sometimes they are not, but the reality remains the same – the drug cartels are making billions of dollars.

Mexican President Felipe Calderon has taken unprecedented steps to quash the drug cartels and root out corruption in Mexico.

His efforts have coincided with increased border security efforts in the United States.

In response, the cartels have resorted to extraordinary violence and gruesome tactics to protect their turf and profits.

Last year alone, violence related to the drug trade claimed the lives of about 6,000 individuals – a number that can only be described as shocking.

Unfortunately, the violence has shown little sign of stopping, causing President Calderon to send thousands more troops to Mexican border towns in turmoil.

Mexico is not alone in this fight, however.

In December, the first \$197 million of the Merida Initiative provided by Congress was released.

Secretary Janet Napolitano has already made it clear that she will be giving the situation in Mexico her “utmost attention.”

I can assure you that this issue has the Committee on Homeland Security’s attention as well.

The violence is in America’s own backyard and cannot be ignored.

At the same time, we must be careful about predictions that Mexico is at risk of becoming a “failed state” or implying that U.S. border communities are in a similar state as their Mexican counterparts.

Instead, we need thoughtful planning and decisive action where appropriate to respond to

the potential threat to the U.S and to help Mexico respond to this very serious problem.

The Department of Homeland Security is uniquely positioned both to help curb the violence and to respond should the violence "spill over" into the U.S.

Thousands of Border Patrol agents, Customs and Border Protection officers, ICE special agents, and other Department personnel work the southwest border every day.

With the right resources, they may assist with interdicting the southbound shipments of weapons and cash that help feed the violence.

They would also be our first line of defense should violence spill over the border.

Given its integral role, it is vital that the Department of Homeland Security have a sound strategy in place to deal with the situation in Mexico.

Despite some of the dire predictions, we hope never to need to put such a plan into action.

However, we do need to make sure DHS has all the resources and authorities it needs to carry out such a plan if necessary.

As Chairman of this Committee, I will do everything in my power to ensure that happens.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the Department's plans to utilize its assets to prevent and, if necessary, respond to border violence or other incidents along our shared border with Mexico.

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