

**TESTIMONY OF
SYLVIA AGUILAR
CHIEF DEPUTY
EL PASO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
EI PASO COUNTY, TEXAS**

**BEFORE
HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT, INVESTIGATIONS AND MANAGEMENT**

**ON
"A CALL TO ACTION: NARCO-TERRORISM'S THREAT TO THE SOUTHERN
U.S. BORDER –**

**October 14, 2011
Washington, DC**

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Keating, Members of the Subcommittee, it is a privilege and an honor to appear before you today.

For close to 30 years, I have served in law enforcement in El Paso, Texas. For 25 years, I worked with the El Paso Police Department being promoted through the ranks from Detective to Deputy Chief. Since 2009, I have been the Chief Deputy of the El Paso County Sheriff's office.

The City of El Paso, in far west Texas, has a population of approximately 650,000. It is the sixth-largest city in Texas and the 19th-largest city in the United States. El Paso County covers an area of more than 1000 square miles and has a total population of approximately 800,000. El Paso sits across the border from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. The two cities form a combined international metropolitan area of 2.3 million.

El Paso is a great and thriving community. It is home to the University of Texas at El Paso and the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center at El Paso as well as Fort Bliss, one of the largest military complexes of the United States Army.

In 2010 El Paso was awarded All-America City. This prestigious award is the oldest community recognition program in the nation. The Brookings Institute's Metro Monitor has ranked El Paso in the top 20 performing metropolitan areas for over a year, and an independent housing market forecaster, Housingpredictor.com, forecasts El Paso to lead the nation in home price increases for the year

As I am sure the Members of this committee are well aware, our neighbor Juarez has faced an increase of drug-related violence for the past several years. Since 2008 there have been nearly 8900 homicides. The violence stems from two drug cartels are fighting for control of a lucrative drug corridor and rampant street crime.

El Paso, on the other hand, is a city of law abiding citizens who work hard every day to support their families and make their community a better place to live, work and play. Citizens trust and respect our law enforcement agencies – local, state and federal- which work together to keep our community safe. El Paso is so safe that it is been recognized as the safest large city (over 500,000 population) by CQ Press which produces the Annual Safest City Award. Prior to this recognition, El Paso has been named either the 2nd or 3rd safest large city for the last 12 years, even in light of the situation in Juarez.

The McCaffrey/Scales report states that "living and conducting business in a Texas border county is tantamount to living in a war zone in which civil authorities, law enforcement agencies as well as citizens are under attack around the clock". This is an extreme exaggeration.

Living and conducting business in El Paso is harmonious and thriving. El Paso, unlike so many

other communities in our country, was not hit as hard by the economic woes. We attribute that to our military base (Ft. Bliss) and the individuals that operate and open legitimate businesses and keep our economy flourishing.

The report also claims that "Texas is the tactical close combat zone and front line in this conflict", but we are not a combat zone. The combat zone and the front line are in Mexico. El Paso County is not a war zone; it is one of the safest communities and best performing metropolitan areas of the country. I urge each of you to visit and see for yourself what a great place El Paso is.

Finally, although we don't get involved in port operations, I know drugs are coming through the north bound lanes and guns and money are being sent south to Mexico through our ports. And we see the backups on both sides of the border with traffic waiting to go through. We need resources to upgrade the infrastructure of these ports and increase the numbers of Customs and Border Patrol officers, so we can ensure that the drugs, guns and money that fuel the cartel war are not getting through the ports and that the legitimate trade is.

Again thank you for inviting me to testify today.