

Statement from Texas Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples
“A Call to Action: Narco-Terrorism’s Threat to the Southern U.S. Border” Hearing
Before the House Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management
of the House Committee on Homeland Security
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Todd Staples, Texas Commissioner of Agriculture.

Texas Border Security: A Strategic Military Assessment documents in clear terms, we have a violently insecure, porous border, with a lack of operational control. Texas is simply calling for sufficient action - ample federal resources to secure our country. No one is blaming our national leaders for the drug cartels’ seedy motives and heinous actions – but saying “our border is safer than ever” signals two dangerous messages to these narco-terrorist organizations that are infiltrating America: 1. We are satisfied with the status quo, and 2. We are not going to drive you out of business. Congressmen, the only message from a united America should be this: We will meet any opposing force with greater force and we will not cede one inch of American soil.

This committee knows firsthand from testimony and field hearings the threats in Mexico that have been well documented as well as our law enforcement and foreign aid efforts at the national, state, and local levels to counter these violent transnational criminal organizations. At this very moment a critical industry to our national security is under increasing attack. Texas farmers and ranchers along the U.S.-Mexico border are regularly becoming victims of intimidation, aggression and outright violence by armed trespassers that often have direct ties to Mexico’s drug cartels. With alarming frequency, Texans along the border are subjected to physical harassment, illegal trespassing, property damage, theft and the illegal trafficking of people and drugs on their property.

I come to you today to say we must not minimize the actions of terrorists. This border assessment tells the stories of farmers, ranchers and rural landowners who have been victims of violence; who witness grim atrocities on a far too frequent basis; and generally live in fear of those who cross their land day and night. Americans should be offended that statistics are being used to diminish the crimes committed against their fellow citizens by narco-terrorists.

Let me be clear, this is happening on our side of the border and each day that they threaten a farmer or rancher, they get closer to impacting our nation’s food supply.

American agriculture produces the safest, most affordable and most reliable food and fiber supply in the world – and Texas is a major contributor to those production efforts. Despite an ongoing drought and raging wildfires, the Texas agriculture industry has shown significant strengths in a trying time for the U.S. economy. We continue to lead the nation in the production of cattle, cotton, sheep, goats, mohair and many other products that American consumers rely on daily. Agriculture is also a significant sector of the Texas economy, producing an economic impact of about \$100 billion a year. Mexico is the No. 2 export market for the United States and our No. 3 source of imports. It is this legal trade that we seek to preserve.

Let me give you a snapshot of the grave danger Texans face due to an insecure border. These are only some of the acts of violence these transnational criminal organizations have taken in the past few months:

- On Feb. 18 – Two energy company employees were assaulted and robbed in rural Webb County
- On March 11 – A ranch foreman was injured from shots fired by suspected drug cartel members in rural Webb County
- On June 9 – Texas DPS and Game Wardens were shot at by drug traffickers in rural Hidalgo County
- On June 19 – U.S. Border Patrol was shot at by drug traffickers in an area that has seen repeated shootings aimed at U.S. law enforcement in Hidalgo County
- On July 14 – Shots fired at water district workers in rural Hidalgo County
- On Sept. 27 – Shots fired, killing at least one individual, on Hidalgo County highway
- The personal testimony of the farmers, ranchers and employees being told to “turn around, look the other way, leave your property, or else,” while cartel members run drugs and humans through private Texas properties.

All of these incidents – which law enforcement believes were caused by criminals linked to the cartels – have taken place this year, not on the southern side of the border as many would have you believe, but rather on American soil in Texas. We cannot allow the livelihoods and peaceful enjoyment of private property to continue to be jeopardized. We cannot allow our standards to devolve to a new tolerance threshold for violence against private property owners. In addition to acts of violence, Texans are witnessing the direct consequences of narco-terrorism and organized crime. Rural residents experience the human tragedy of finding dead bodies on their properties – those of the sick and frail who fell behind and were left to die by the traffickers. These well-documented cases are proof that these terrorists do not shed their label simply by stepping into the United States to bring organized crime and traffic drugs, people, weapons, and money.

We’ve heard of farmers selling out and closing their operations. We are talking about our domestic food supply. We cannot stand by and watch terrorists frighten farmers out of agriculture. We do not like being dependent on foreign oil; we must not become dependent on foreign food.

Transnational terrorists do not send their activity reports to the Homeland Security Secretary. We all know drug trafficking and human smuggling is occurring at alarming rates. During the Super Bowl in Dallas this past year, the Texas Attorney General’s office focused resources to assist local law enforcement in combating underage prostitution and concerned faith-based organizations led a campaign during the Super Bowl to bring awareness to this issue. Are we really pretending there is not a problem?

We all know the transnational criminal activity has been heading to our border. What I’m telling you today is they are here, they have arrived and we need to stop making excuses, stop blaming each other and stop this incursion before the violence statistics exceed the naysayer’s thresholds of tolerance. I for one have no tolerance for these transnational criminals trespassing on the soil, the sovereignty and the rights of the United States of America.

The reality is our porous border is a problem for all Americans – not just those at the border. Law enforcement in New York, Los Angeles, Dallas and Houston have confirmed that cartels have gangs operating in these cities. How can the border be called secure when fierce assaults continue against American citizens on American soil; nightly incursions occur across Texas ranches; and dead bodies are scattered throughout private properties?

Unfortunately, the administration and others have repeatedly said the U.S.-Mexico border is “as secure now as it has ever been.” While I acknowledge the progress and the gains made in urban border areas; the drugs in American cities and the cash flowing south say that interpretation is simply untrue. The increases in federal support have resulted in two scenarios along the Texas-Mexico border: 1) lower crime rates in urban border communities like Brownsville and El Paso, and 2) a rural runaround of the drug cartels now focusing their efforts where there is the weakest presence of federal border enforcement. Keep in mind that 93 percent of the land in counties along the Texas-Mexico border is unincorporated and overwhelmingly rural.

The bottom line is our border is not secure. What we have are transnational criminal organizations basing their operations in a foreign country and deploying military-type incursions on American soil. And our President indicates this is okay by saying we are more secure today? Members of Congress, please do not rest until we convince the President, an insecure border is an insecure America.

Texas is home to 64 percent of the U.S.-Mexico border, but only 44 percent of the Border Patrol agents. There are 14 Border Patrol agents per border mile on average from California to New Mexico. Yet there are less than half that many per mile in Texas at 6.2 agents per border mile. I assure you, and so do Generals McCaffrey and Scales in their report, there is no reason for Texas to have anything but a higher presence of federal law enforcement. One of which is to overturn and prevent a strategically beneficial, centrally located entry point for their drugs into the United States. The use of hub cities in Texas such as Austin and Dallas, already serve as gateways to transport drugs to markets across the U.S.

Each time the federal government denies there is a problem, only the cartels and traffickers benefit – they gain courage and territory. The federal government must act now and do more to protect America. Our lives and our livelihoods depend on a secure border where legal trade and commerce can grow. The entire border region is critical to the strength and future of Texas and our nation, and we need to see these communities prosper and economies grow without the threat of violence associated with illegal drug and human trafficking.

The federal government needs a smarter, dynamic response to avoid funneling this traffic into our rural areas. Texans want action and all Americans need action. The Texas Legislature, state and local law enforcement have invested considerable resources to support the mission of the U.S. Border Patrol and meet the public safety concerns of their constituents. These local, state and federal law enforcement officers are doing the best job they can, but ineffective federal policies have only allowed the problems to fester. Our Border Patrol and local and state officers are doing the best job they can, but they are in dire need of the strategic support of our federal government to take the fight to the cartels and aid our neighbors to the south. The broader

strategy our government is employing does not appear coordinated, effective or have the full attention of this administration to follow through in solving this problem.

To get that attention and respond to the urgent pleas for lifesaving help, I launched a website to document the real stories of Texans suffering from our insecure border. ProtectYourTexasBorder.com posts videos from those who have bravely come forward – in many cases anonymously for fear of retaliation – to share their encounters with these dangerous individuals. These are true accounts that document what is really happening on our side of the border. The evidence is clear; the border is not secure.

It is imperative the administration help us secure the border. On Monday, September 26th, I unveiled a detailed strategic assessment of the United States' southern border between Texas and Mexico that chronicles the impact of violent drug cartels and transnational criminal organizations. Co-authored by retired General Barry McCaffrey, the former Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy under President Bill Clinton and the former Commander of all U.S. troops in Central and South America, and retired Major-General Robert Scales, the former Commandant of the United States Army War College, the assessment details the border problem in undeniable, stark terms. It also provides a strategic analysis of the danger and threat to our nation, and advocates for expanded resources and attention to secure the border.

Their assessment, along with many others that have genuinely looked at the war raging along our southern border, have concluded we cannot miss this opportunity to join with the Mexican government to confront narco-terrorism, by addressing the strategic needs this region requires to end the illegal flow of narcotics, people, guns and money.

Targeting these terrorists and securing the border only solves part of the problem; you also must address other weaknesses that have led to the abuse of our border and laws. While I recognize these are two separate issues, it is undeniable that reducing the number of illegal entries into the U.S. by reforming our failed guest labor and immigration program would allow our law enforcement to focus resources on the remaining reduced illegal border crossings. Any expanded effort to secure the border would be benefited by substantially focusing on reforming a failed immigration system, which in turn would allow Border Patrol and law enforcement resources to be more fully engaged in stopping violent drug and human traffickers. All Americans, regardless of their background or culture, deserve a legal immigration system that meets our workforce needs and diminishes the demand for the coyote smugglers and traffickers who are exploiting and endangering lives.

Allowing a porous border is not only a threat to our citizens and nation's food supply, but also a threat to our homeland security. Clearly, such a threat stands in direct contrast to the protections authored by our Founding Fathers in the United States Constitution.

This debate can be summed up with one question: Would America allow terrorists based in Canada to make nightly incursions into New York? The answer is a resounding "No!" We need help and we need it now with the immediate deployment of additional boots on the ground.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to any questions you may have.