

## **Testimony of Dr. Michael Vickers**

### **Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations and Management**

#### **"A Call to Action: Narco-Terrorism's Threat to the Southern U.S. Border"**

**Friday, October 14, 2011**

Thank you Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Keating, and Members of the Committee for inviting me here today.

I'm Dr. Mike Vickers, a rancher and veterinarian from the city of Falfurrias in Brooks County, Texas.

Brooks County contains a Border Patrol check point that is approximately 65 miles from the Mexican Border (Reynosa Mexico). I have come here today to testify on the violence, crime, and lawlessness that is overwhelming Brooks County and its surrounding counties. Most counties in Texas that have border Patrol Checkpoints are rural counties with small sheriff departments. Human and drug smuggling by gangs and organized crime has overwhelmed our local sheriff's department. Brooks County sheriff's department has 6 deputies to patrol 943 square miles of ranch country. Many ranches are left to fend for themselves.

Ranchers are being threatened if they call Border Patrol or local law enforcement to report smuggling activities on their property. Some have left their ranches and have moved to the cities of San Antonio, McAllen or Corpus Christi. There are hundreds of smuggling routes throughout Brooks and its surrounding counties that are used by criminals to skirt the Border Patrol Checkpoints.

This year our sheriff's department busted a large drug ring affiliated with the Zeta Mexican Drug Cartel. For over 7 years they had shipped over 2000 pounds of narcotics a week through our ranches. An unsealed indictment revealed that two Zetas had come to Falfurrias and were shown where our sheriff deputies lived so that they could come back, kidnap them, and find out who the informant was. This is still and ongoing concern.

Property damage is staggering, cut fences, mountains of trash, destroyed water sources, vandalized homes, and stolen vehicles are everyday occurrences. Large range fires have also been set by smugglers. A recent fire killed at least 3 illegal travelers and required many more to be air lifted to safety. This picture is of a ranch fire this year started by a vehicle with Mexican plates that left the road fleeing the Border Patrol and DPS (Department of Public Safety.) It carried 21 illegal immigrants and was clocked at 112mph by DPS. Border Patrol was able to save 4 of the trapped passengers moments before the truck exploded. The truck passengers were undocumented, illegal immigrants from India.

Most unsettling are the dead bodies showing up on the ranches. 51 Illegal aliens' deaths have occurred so far this year with another 31 reported still missing and nearly 500 total deaths since October 2004.

Some are murdered but at least all are criminal homicides. One day when my wife came home she noticed the dogs playing with a round object in the yard. It was a woman's skull. Her body was found about 150 yards from our back door. She had a fractured tibia. She didn't walk out there with a broken leg. We suspect rape and murder. Other dead women were found on my south fence and my neighbor's ranch during that same period.

Last year three female skeletons were found on an adjacent ranch southeast of my home. Many women are sexually assaulted, raped, and brutalized. Last Saturday night a group of women were given a pill by a Coyote (a human smuggler) to give them endurance for the trek around the Checkpoint. All of the women became drowsy and fell asleep. One awoke that morning nude next to the nude coyote. She grabbed her clothes and fled. Fortunately she found the highway and then the Border Patrol Found her. She was raped and our sheriff's department is investigating. Many women dress like men because of the threat of sexual assault.

Dealing with the dead bodies has exhausted our County resources. I have aerial photos of our Sheriff Departments compound containing hundreds of vehicles confiscated from drug and ranch smugglers. Seven years ago myself and others started a group called The Texas Border Volunteers to help law enforcement control the smuggling through private property. We are concerned about the other thousands of people coming in to our state and nation without us know who they are and where they come from. We have monthly operations and report criminal activity to law enforcement (USBP). We also enlist camera systems to monitor smuggling pathways (see photos). We have reported hundreds of illegal aliens and drug smugglers during our operations. Hundreds of illegal aliens have been rescued by our volunteers. These are people who had been cheated of their money and left alone in the wilderness. Many go lost for days without food and water and ultimately die. We are currently in our second week of operations. Tuesday night we reported and assisted Border Patrol in apprehending 15 illegal aliens (criminal trespassers.) 13 of them were from Mexico, one was from Honduras, and one other from Guatemala. We see many OTM (Other Than Mexican). The Rio Grande Valley (McAllen) sector leads the Nation in OTM's with 20,284 individuals as of September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (figure for this fiscal year). If the Border Patrol only catches 8-10% then we have an astronomical number of OTM's slipping in every year.

We have seen groups carrying guns. On one operation the coyote leading 33 Chinese illegal immigrants was carrying a rifle.

Diseases are a big concern both human and animal alike. There is a big fear of Hoof and Mouth disease being brought in from China. Currently there is an outbreak of Hoof and Mouth disease in Taipei, Republic of China. Chinese have been a leading OTM group in the Falfurrias Border Patrol area. (Picture of Chinese apprehended during TBP operation) During our March operation, illegal Chinese immigrants had paid \$50,000 each for transportation into the United States. Africa also has Foot and Mouth disease, and many Africans are being smuggled through South Texas.

People from special interest countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq are a concern for all of us. Other countries represented in OTM apprehensions include Dominican Republic, Somalia, Sri

Lanka, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Venezuela, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Ukraine, Poland, Columbia, Ecuador and more.

Some ranchers want to sell their land and move away, but they are finding there are no buyers willing to purchase their ranch land. Many properties simply won't sell because of the prevalent criminal activity. Numerous ranches along highways cannot graze cattle because of the constant fence damage. My fence along US Highway 281 is electrified. Some of my clients along the river have ceased agriculture operations because of threats or they have a present danger. Ranchers on the Mexican side have been run off their property and the cartels are fighting on their land for river access. My partner and I have both heard machine gun fire when working on ranches close to the river. Now hunting leases are in jeopardy of being dropped by hunters fearing the danger. This would be a big blow to the economy of the county and the individual ranches.

**Dangerous encounters:**

I found a rancher on a highway after dark who was robbed, tied to a tree, shot twice, and had his truck stolen by two illegal aliens. He was rushed to the hospital and survived.

A friend's wife was attacked by 10 Guatemalan illegal immigrants as she was attempting to open the ranches main gate while bringing the kids home from school. She was able to jump in the car and escape.

I had five illegal aliens with sticks and cedar fence posts attempt to take my truck when I was leaving a ranch gate.

This year a group of Indian illegal immigrants tried to take the vehicle from a neighbor's ranch hand.

Encounters with smugglers and illegal aliens are daily occurrences and most ranchers and their families are not leaving the house without being armed. In many parts of the county many ranchers cannot keep employees because of the fear that is constantly circulating.

My wife has had numerous frightening encounters. One in particular was a large muscular man with a pencil thin mustache and beard that followed her from her horse barn up to our house. He was not speaking English or Spanish, and she had no cell phone or weapon. She was able to make it safely inside the house and call the Border Patrol. He continued to try to walk up into the driveway of the house but luckily the Border Patrol arrived quickly. That was the last time she left the house unarmed or without her cell phone. The man was a Brazilian split from a group of 40 other illegal Brazilian immigrants, and he was speaking Portuguese.

Recently two Coyotes in a vehicle loaded with illegal aliens plowed through a local woman's residence. She was killed.

Our lives have been severely compromised to say the least. The Border Patrol's budget in South Texas has been dramatically cut. Local and State law enforcement and Border Patrol need help! We all as Americans need them to have adequate resources to win this war on our southern border.

Again, thank you again to the Members of the Committee for having me here today. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.