



KINNEY COUNTY ATTORNEY
BRENT SMITH

President Reagan once said, “*A nation that cannot control its borders is not a nation.*” As I sit before you today, I can attest to the fact that we no longer have control of our borders. We have surrendered it to criminal cartels and in doing so, have jeopardized our own national security. To give this topic the importance it deserves, one might argue that this hearing should take place on the banks of the Rio Grande. While doing so would jeopardize the personal safety of each person here, it would provide this committee with a firsthand experience of what Texans are living through every day.

Kinney County shares 17 miles of border with Mexico and is located between Del Rio and Eagle Pass. While the jurisdiction of my office may be limited geographically to Kinney County, you can be certain that the facts of my testimony expand well beyond its borders and apply to every other county along our southern border with Mexico. For Texans living on the border, words cannot adequately describe the conditions on the ground. Our homes are being broken into in the middle of the night. The main streets of our small towns are now the place of high-speed car chases with cartel smugglers. Walking outside on our own property after dark is no longer safe. To put it plainly, Texans no longer enjoy the safety and security of a sovereign border.

Kinney County has a population of only 3,200 residents, most of whom are farmers and ranchers. In the year 2020, the county reported 134 criminal charges for prosecution. This drastically changed in 2021 after President Biden issued multiple executive orders, revoking numerous border security policies that DHS was operating under to successfully secure our border. Shortly thereafter, criminal cartels seized control of our border and imposed their own policies that would allow their criminal enterprise to thrive.

*In 2021, the number of criminal charges increased from 134 during the previous year to 2,708.

*In 2022, this number exploded to 6,800 criminal charges.

*In 2023, there were 5,826 criminal charges.

Kinney County normally operates within a \$6 million-dollar annual budget; however, the open border policies enacted by the Biden administration has required the county to significantly expand the capacities of our local criminal justice system, costing Texas taxpayers an **additional** 10.5 million dollars (\$10,532,441.47).

Perhaps however, the most significant cost that we have sustained during this border crisis is the loss of the safety and security we once enjoyed as Americans. In order to protect the safety of students attending public school from the threat posed by high-speed car chases with cartel smugglers, the school administration was forced to erect military style vehicle barricades around its campus. On at least one occasion, the smuggled occupants of a vehicle breached these barricades on foot and attempted to enter the school while the campus was on lock down.

In another incident, a county resident was forced off the highway during her commute to work when a human smuggler shot her vehicle multiple times in an effort to avoid capture by law enforcement. This resident was forced to quit her job due to the danger she subjected herself to by simply commuting to work.

The unmistakable sound of a helicopter in flight now causes families to bring their children inside the home and shelter in place until law enforcement gives an all clear. What dollar amount do you assign to the loss of safety and security? I am not certain, but I know the cost is high.

In an effort to provide adequate warning to residents of an ongoing law enforcement pursuit, a county wide text alert system has been implemented, which has undoubtedly saved many lives. Even with such proactive measures in place, two tax paying residents have died because medical emergency services were not available when they were needed most. On both occasions, all available paramedics were already deployed to human smuggling events miles away and were unable to respond to the county residents. This is a clear example of how open border policies have deadly consequences for Americans across this nation.

The violence and lawlessness occurring along the southern border is not sustainable for any sovereign nation, let alone a Texas county comprised of 3,200 citizens. Make no mistake, the willful neglect of this administration's refusal to enforce the laws of our nation has compromised the safety and security of not only Texans, but every American. Texans should not have to bear the financial burden of securing the border while this administration actively undermines our efforts to protect our own citizens. However, we have a sacred duty to preserve those liberties we inherited from others who paid the ultimate price. Texans have never backed down from a fight and we will not begin to do so now.