

Testimony by Joe Frank Martinez, Sheriff, Val Verde County, Texas
House Homeland Security Committee
“Ending the Crisis: America’s Borders and Path to Security”
February 7, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

Chairman McCaul and Distinguished Members of House Homeland Security committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today on issues that affect every citizen in my border county of Val Verde, the State of Texas, and the United States of America.

I have spent 39-years as a career law enforcement professional. As immediate past Chairman of Texas Border Sheriff’s Coalition and Current Chairman of the Southwestern Border Sheriff’s Coalition, I have dedicated my Law Enforcement career to the serving the citizens of the State of Texas right on the Texas / Mexico border, both at the State level, as a member of the Texas Department of Public Safety and as a local Police Officer for the City of Del Rio and now as Sheriff of Val Verde County.

The Texas Border Sheriffs Coalition is comprised of 20 border Sheriffs, all of whom are within twenty-five miles of the Mexican border. Texas shares approximately 1254 miles of border with the Republic of Mexico. Val Verde County Texas consists of 3200 square miles and shares approximately 110 miles of border with the State of Coahuila Mexico.

The Southwestern Border Sheriff’s Coalition which includes the States of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas combine for a total of 1989 miles of border between the United States and the Republic of Mexico. Within that 1986 mile of border from San Diego California to Brownsville Texas lie 31 counties. The terrain throughout much of these areas varies from rural ranch and farmlands, high desert to desert like valleys and mountain ranges. Most of these lands are titled to private landowners; some areas are national or state parks, so the needs of each of these counties are unique in their own way.

The Texas Border Sheriff’s Coalition was founded (2005) to provide a cooperative effort to affect a regional solution to a national problem. We all share common issues, but there is no one issue more important than making sure that we have secure communities in which the people feel safe in their homes and surroundings.

Sheriffs have a vested interest in the law enforcement, economic, social impact, health, and the overall quality of life of those that they serve. Sheriffs are unique in understanding the pulse of their communities and a public that evaluates us during election time that determines whether we stay employed every four years.

MISSION STATEMENT:

Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition was organized on May 4, 2005, and is represented by the Chief Law Enforcement Officer of each respective county. Texas Sheriffs, empowered by the state constitution, are committed, from a national security perspective, to protect lives, property, and the rights of the people by maintaining order and security in the United States along the Republic of Mexico border and enforcing the law impartially, while providing police service in partnership with other law enforcement agencies and community partners.

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

The consequences of an unsecure border are felt throughout the United States. Each border county sits at the gateway into our country and is the first line of defense in dealing with law enforcement, social, and economic issues for both legitimate and illegitimate trade and travel.

The issue here is public safety. Immigration, though an important factor, is a separate but related issue whose responsibility lies within Federal government agencies. These Federal agencies that we work with every day have had a difficult job in carrying out their duties due to administrative policy issues and changes and not laws that are on our books. Sheriffs only encounter Immigration issues as a byproduct of other criminal acts which are referred to the Federal government for their action.

Some of the problems we encounter most are drug smuggling, human smuggling, stolen vehicles, crimes against persons, crimes against property..... and violent crimes such as murder, rape, sexual assault, dealing with transnational criminal organizations and the list goes on.....

As many of you know, because of lower populations and property values, most border counties lack a sufficient tax base to support the multi-faceted needs of the Sheriff's Office. Each and every one of us are affected directly, in one way or another, by what happens on the border, and as such border States and the Federal Government are a natural source to support the needs of the border as it impacts public safety.

There is talk about a border wall or fence; in some areas this is a viable solution, but it is not the solution in and of itself. Man power and technology play a major key role in securing our borders.

The problem for most Sheriffs is a shortfall of resources to address the problems identified here, which are not all inclusive, but are prioritized as Manpower, Travel and Training, Equipment, Direct Operating Expenses, and Contract Services. The Sheriffs of the Texas Border Sheriffs Coalition offer a positive, efficient, and less expensive approach to border security based on a partnership of action.

SOLUTION:

The solution offered by the Texas Border Sheriffs Coalition's is one of cooperation, being at the table to discuss these issue that affect our communities on a daily basis. **ALL** Federal, State and Local law enforcement need to work together as we move forward in finding the solution in securing our borders and our future. No one single form of government can do it alone.

SUMMARY:

The plan for security in the communities along the border with Mexico as presented by the members of the Texas Border Sheriffs Coalition is to provide a regional solution for a national problem.

The plan is based on a partnership of action and not rhetoric. It is based on existing cooperating working agreements and the willingness to share lessons learned and put into place best practices.

The plan is formulated by Sheriffs who have ownership in their respective communities they serve and understand how local needs interrelate from a law enforcement, economic, social, health, and environmental perspective.

The initiative is created by Sheriffs with respect for all Federal and State agencies, and in support of their men and women who are working on the front lines each and every day. The difference is in a solution that is based on local community impact and not by policies enacted by people thousands of miles away.

I want to once again thank Chairman McCaul and the entire Committee for this opportunity to address the needs of our Border Sheriffs. May GOD Bless the United States of America and every Law Enforcement Officer protecting our front lines.