



TESTIMONY OF

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For a Hearing

BEFORE

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security

ON

“Smart Investments: Technology’s Role in a Multi-Layered Border
Security Strategy”

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Chairman Higgins, Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Correa, Ranking Member Ivey, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the conditions along the Southwest Border and the efforts by the Terrell County, Texas, Sheriff's Office to serve and protect our citizens.

I am honored to represent the citizens of Terrell County and describe to you what the citizens, law enforcement, and Border Patrol experience in our portion of the United States and Mexico border.

Other than my time in the United States Air Force and in Washington, D.C., while assigned to U.S. Border Patrol Headquarters, I've spent my entire life as a resident and in the U.S. Border Patrol along the U.S./Mexico border. The last 11 years of my 26-year Border Patrol career were spent as the Patrol Agent in Charge of the Sanderson Border Patrol Station, which is also my hometown and where I am Sheriff.

As background, Terrell County is located in the rugged, unforgiving, vast Big Bend Region of Texas and shares 54 miles of international border with Mexico. Terrell County is the 10th largest county in the State of Texas and encompasses almost 2,400 square miles. The Border Patrol Station there is responsible for 91 miles of border, which is the third largest portion of border with Mexico by a United State Border Patrol Station along the entire U.S./Mexico border.

Terrell County, does not have a crime problem, we have is a Border Security problem. Over the last 3 ½ years, Terrell County like much of the Southwest Border has seen a significant increase in illegal alien apprehensions; however, what has happened in Eagle Pass, Del Rio, El Paso, Lukeville and San Diego with masses of people crossing the border, does not happen in Terrell County. What we experience are people who do not want to be apprehended nor give-up. When we encounter them in the desert, they run. When we encounter them on the highways, they lead us in high-speed pursuits before bailing out and absconding.

The next set of statistics I am going to share with you are the Sanderson Border Patrol Station fiscal year apprehension and gotaway percentages compared to fiscal year 2020. In fiscal year 2021 there was a 289% increase in illegal alien arrests and a 323% increase in gotaways. In fiscal year 2022, there was a 417% increase in illegal alien arrests and a 467% increase in gotaways. Last fiscal year, there was a decrease in apprehensions and gotaways, but it was still

higher than the historical numbers with 189% increase in illegal alien arrests and 203% gotaways.

Citizens of Terrell County pay the price daily for the out-of-control Southwest Border. We do not have the financial, medical or emergency resources as many of the other larger communities affected by the activity along the border. Yet, the negative and detrimental results are the same. Valuable and costly emergency and medical resources are too often diverted to border security. In my county, landowners have to repair waterlines, fences and structures destroyed by illegal aliens crossing their properties, as well as the significant trash, human biohazard waste and erosion. Emergency medical services and law enforcement service has at times been unavailable due to responding to illegal aliens that are crossing the border.

There has been a total of 37 known deaths of illegal aliens attempting to cross my portion of the border over the last the 3 ½ years. Historically, there was one a year. All but four of those deaths were from exposure due to the hot summer months as well as the cold winter fronts that come through Terrell County. Four died in a vehicle pursuit, which resulted in a head-on collision. High-speed pursuits occur with almost every illegal alien smuggling load encountered and puts citizens my team and I are responsible for in harm's way.

Due to the amount of illegal alien smuggling activity coupled with the amount of vehicle pursuits we were involved in since I took over as Sheriff, I reached out to Governor Abbott of the State of Texas and requested additional resources to assist my office. Governor Abbott and I discussed the situation, and within a week, the additional resources I requested were allotted. With assistance from the Texas Department of Public Safety and Texas Parks and Wildlife, together we seized over 100 vehicles from illegal alien smugglers in the months of November 2022. Since then, we have observed a shift in tactics by smugglers and are not seeing the same level of activity in Terrell County. Those shifts in tactics is what brings us together today to discuss technology and advancements.

I have seen the U.S. Border Patrol evolve with technology. Technological evolutions have assisted the U.S. Border Patrol achieve tremendous success with border security. I've witnessed seismic and magnetic sensors evolve into imaging sensors, scope trucks have evolved from

black blobs on a screen to Mobile Video Surveillance Systems, which use infrared night vision and radars with a near crystal clear view.

As the Patrol Agent in Charge of the Sanderson Border Patrol Station, I worked with Sheriff Ronny Dodson of Brewster County, former Terrell County Sheriff Clint McDonald to develop a network of Buckeye game cameras that shared real-time images to our respective offices. This was a collaborative effort to enhance border security and was the first effort of its kind along the U.S./Mexico border.

Also, during my command of the Border Patrol Station in Sanderson, Texas, we received and deployed our first eight Autonomous Surveillance Towers. This is an incredible asset, yet we quickly learned they detected more activity and we did not have the manpower to pursue everything the towers revealed. With that being said, you can have as much technology on the border, but without the right balance of manpower, the technology is useless.

The State of Texas is also utilizing various technology platforms along the U.S./Mexico border. In 2008, I was assigned as U.S. Border Patrol's representative to the State of Texas, during this time, Texas Department of Public Safety first deployed their Drawbridge game cameras along the along the U.S./Mexico border. This program now has over 7,000 game cameras along the border. The State of Texas has also constructed over 40 miles of border wall in Texas and has mounted camaras systems on the wall as well.

As Sheriff, through Operation Lone Star, my office has been able to receive night vision and thermal imaging devices and we are waiting on approval of three Mobile Video Surveillance platforms.

I think defining success for border security initiatives at the county level involves a collaborative approach and setting realistic, localized objectives. Success at the county level is measured by our ability to effectively utilize limited resources to enhance security and reduce illegal activity. This means fostering strong partnerships with federal and state agencies, maximizing the impact of every dollar spent, and ensuring our personnel are well-trained and equipped.

One key indicator of success has been our effective use of grants and state programs. For example, through Operation Lone Star and Operation Stone Garden, we've been able to hire additional deputies, acquire new vehicles, and obtain vital technology like thermal cameras and night vision equipment. These resources have significantly bolstered our capability to patrol and secure the border.

Our success is also evident in the reduced level of illegal activity in Terrell County. By taking control of the highways and leveraging surveillance technology, we've deterred illegal crossings and forced smugglers to reroute further north, avoiding our jurisdiction. This shift is confirmed through intelligence reports and feedback from sources on the ground.

At the federal level, success is often measured by broader metrics, such as overall apprehension numbers and the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects. The federal government operates with a much larger budget and a focus on nationwide border security strategies. In contrast, at the county level, we work with more constrained budgets and focus on immediate, localized impacts.

Ultimately, success for us is defined by our ability to protect our community efficiently and effectively, using available resources and strong partnerships to fill gaps where federal and state support is limited. This local perspective ensures that we address specific threats and challenges unique to our region, contributing to the overall border security efforts in a meaningful way.

The chaos along our Southwest Border is solvable and preventable. Solutions exist, they need only ask those of us on the ground dealing with this every day. The border is open, overrun, and the criminal organizations are taking full advantage of our political gridlock.

To secure our borders we must go back to securing the areas in between our Ports of Entry. To do this, added resources such as manpower, technology and infrastructure are required to detect, track and apprehend those who mean us harm. Additionally, we must always be prepared for a mass migration crisis. We must bolster our current infrastructure to include the addition of more detention centers that are used for short and long-term detention of illegal aliens, that include immigration judges at each location to expedite immigration hearings.

Ports of Entry along the Southwest Border should be designated for specific needs such as political relief, natural disasters, and work-related industries.

Border Security and Immigration Reform are separate and individual issues. They should be kept and managed separately as border security does not just focus on illegal immigration.

Border security is paramount to National security.

To ensure the security of our nation, those of us that have sworn an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States must come together to develop, implement and execute viable solutions. This is why I am in speaking to you today. The advancement of technology has been key to securing America's border. Technology coupled with the ingenuity of Border Patrol Agents will continue to grow America's advancement of border security. Partnerships and leveraging technologies at the federal, state and local level is also necessary to keep American and American's protected.