



EXTRAORDINARY SKIES.  
UNCOMMON GROUND.

## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

February 1, 2024

Chairman Tom Tiffany  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Good afternoon to the Chair and distinguished members of this committee.

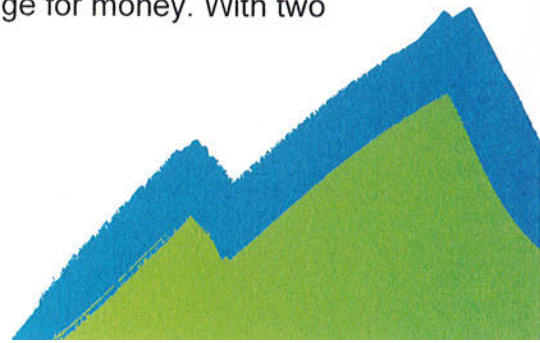
I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee regarding the issues that the city is having from the perspective of a mayor and community leader. I have served the people of Sierra Vista as mayor for 12 months and prior to that, retired as a combat service-disabled veteran of the US. Army. Additionally, I will submit my view from the perspective of a father, husband, mentor, and pastor. Sierra Vista has a population of about 45,000 and is located about 20 miles from the US border with Mexico. Sierra Vista doesn't feel much like a border town. It's a military community home to the Army installation Fort Huachuca which is the home of the Buffalo Soldier.

It has a diverse, well-traveled population, who have settled here often by choice to a quiet, safe lifestyle with a wealth of outdoor recreational opportunities. I would like to say it's the best city in the country and I will stand by that remark.

As I stated we are about 20 miles north of Naco, AZ and it's rare for the dangerous border issues you sometimes read about to impact Sierra Vista. In fact, some of the national rhetoric on border issues makes it harder for us to attract visitors and businesses to our city because people assume the area is more dangerous than it really is. I don't want to add any false perceptions about violent crime in our community. But for the past three years the trend of young people being recruited as so-called load car drivers does pose a very real threat to our residents and visitors, which fuels those narratives about violence near the border. Often using social media, cartels in Mexico recruit residents in the United States to travel to the border to pick up migrants whom the cartels refer to as loads and transport them north in exchange for money. With two

CITY OF SIERRA VISTA  
1011 North Coronado Drive  
Sierra Vista AZ 85635  
520-458-3315

[www.SierraVistaAZ.gov](http://www.SierraVistaAZ.gov)



main thoroughfares, Sierra Vista lies in the path of those load car drivers who travel through our community to proceed north.

In 2020 the Sierra Vista Police Department responded to 19 vehicle pursuits in our City and that total increased to 38 in 2021. By 2022, the number increased to 50 pursuits, and 2023 saw a record total of 70 pursuits where the Sierra Vista Police Department was the primary pursuing agency in 41 vehicle pursuits, and assisted in 29 other pursuits. The average maximum speed of the 41 SVPD pursuits was 90.5 miles per hour through our city.

These load car drivers, who are often teenagers or young adults, are encouraged to drive recklessly through our town to discourage pursuits. This has created extremely dangerous situations to include a load car driver speeding through an elementary school zone and crashing into a bicyclist. Two other incidents resulted in serious accidents at major intersections in town, while one that occurred north of the city ended in a fatality.

Several more incidents resulted in a motorcyclist being hit by a load car, but thankfully it was not a fatality, and also multiple properties being damaged due to load cars hitting their concrete walls. The Sierra Vista Police Department also saw a significant increase in felony case submissions to the Cochise County Attorney's Office from 343 in 2020 to 588 in 2022. The number of felony submissions remained high last year with 531 in 2023.

I want to reiterate that this increase does not stem from violent crimes some may fear plague communities near the border, but is largely tied to the surge in incidents related to load car drivers. These incidents tie up a significant amount of SVPD's limited manpower.

I grew up in Sierra Vista and graduated from the local high school, Buena High School (GO Colts!). I have since raised my family in this extraordinary community. It is a wonderful place to call home. But recently I felt worried for my family members' safety in a way that I never have had to think about before.

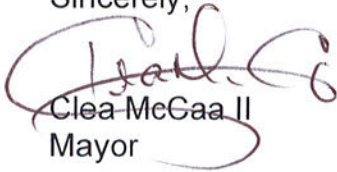
I have encouraged family members to avoid the major highways running through town and stick to local streets because I know these load car drivers pose a very real threat to their safety. I am not alone in feeling this way as many have witnessed the reckless, dangerous behavior of these drivers and many others have seen headlines about the damage and harm they have caused.

Our law enforcement officers are burning out responding to speeding load cars in our county around the clock. We do not have the resources or personnel to handle this sustained surge in illegal immigration. This county wide issue has caused Cochise County mayors to form a coalition standing behind our Sheriff, Police Chiefs, and our

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federal partners, crafting a letter to President Biden describing our issues and noting the critical work that our officers are doing to keep our county safe. We urge you to make securing the US border and supporting local, county, and federal law enforcement a top priority. Our communities depend on it.

Sincerely,



Clea McGaa II  
Mayor