



*Tulare County, Ca*

**SHERIFF**

Office of  
**MIKE BOUDREAUX**  
Sheriff-Coroner

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**United States House Committee on the Judiciary**  
**“The Biden-Harris Border Crisis: Victim Perspectives”**

**Tuesday, September 10th, 2024**

**10:00am**

**Opening Statement**

Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Nadler, and distinguished Members of the Committee, my name is Mike Boudreaux, and I am the Sheriff of Tulare County in the great state of California.

When it comes to open borders and the impact of illegal immigration in California, as the Sheriff of Tulare County, I have a front row seat to the havoc those can wreak. I'd like to give you examples of some of our more notable cases in the Central Valley that put the impacts of flawed border policies on full display.

The Central San Joaquin Valley of California is known for its robust agriculture. The San Joaquin Valley California is commonly referred to as the major breadbasket of the world as a source of food. We have long had issues of illegal immigration with nearly 80 % of agriculture workers being undocumented however in the last three years we have seen an unprecedented increase of those here illegally who are not associated with agriculture work. These increases have impacted law enforcement stretching resources thin with investigations of violent crime, human trafficking, drug trafficking, gun trafficking, and crimes against children.

Back in December of 2018, we had an incident that became known as the “Reign of Terror”. It was essentially a 24-hour crime spree that one man inflicted upon the people of Tulare County. That man, 36-year-old Gustavo Garcia, had been deported twice and arrested just two days before his reign of terror, which included a murder in Visalia, attempted murders in Exeter and Tulare, as well shootings in Pixley, Sultana and Visalia and an armed robbery in Exeter. Gustavo was killed during a multi-vehicle crash, after he led officers on a high-speed chase through the County. Just minutes before that, he'd shot at TCSO Deputies, who then fired back. He ran off into an orchard and carjacked several farm workers, leading officers on a chase.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement requested an immigration detainer on Garcia after learning of his arrest two days before his terror spree. Due to California's sanctuary state law, the Sheriff's Office was legally prohibited from recognizing or honoring the detainer of this would-be murderer and we were further prohibited from notifying ICE of his release from jail.

What followed was his release from jail and a terror spree on innocent civilians in my community.

As you're aware, Senate Bill 54, California's Sanctuary State Law, forbids law enforcement from working with ICE.

Simply put: the issue of immigration enforcement is not a local issue, but rather a concern which needs to be actively and aggressively addressed by Federal and State officials.

The people who live here, regardless of immigration status, need to be able to reach out to law enforcement when they become a victim.

The current law will not allow the Sheriff's Office to work with ICE, even when a person is identified as being a menace to the undocumented community, such as Gustavo Garcia and so many others.

This creates an environment where people who are undocumented become repeated victims of criminals who are also undocumented. The current California law will not allow ICE to work within our jail system and contact people who pose this threat of committing heinous and violent crimes against members of our community, regardless of their immigration status.

February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023 K9 Duke with the with the San Joaquin County sheriff's office was stabbed to death while attempting to apprehend a burglary suspect in a railyard in Tracy. Officers with the Tracy Police Department had responded to a burglary at the railyard near Brichetto Road and Banta Road at about 12:00 pm. As officers arrived on the scene two men fled from the officers into the train yard. When K9 Duke arrived on the scene one of the men entered the engine room on one of the trains in the yard and barricaded himself inside.

As Duke engaged the subject the man stabbed him multiple times. Officers were able to take the man into custody after he stabbed K9 Duke. K9 Duke was taken to Central Valley Veterinarian Hospital, in Manteca, where he succumbed to his injuries. The suspect was an illegal immigrant Rafael Montoya-Velazquez 30 years of age. Rafael Montoya-Velasquez had been deported multiple times with committing crimes in other states but easily found his way across an open and unsecure border.

When it comes to our open border, the Central Valley is at the foot of the mountain staring down an avalanche. We are confronting a barrage of violent criminals, guns, and drugs flow from the border into our community.

Today, the free flow of illicit and deadly drugs – principally fentanyl – have turned the corridors of Highway 99 and Interstate 5 into two highways of death that unleash unspeakable carnage.

In March of this year, 21 teams from state, local and federal agencies served 31 simultaneous search warrants at various homes throughout Tulare, Kings and Fresno counties. These warrants were the result of a nine-month investigation into information the Tulare County Sheriff's Office received about a large amount of meth that was being transported between Kings and Tulare County.

Throughout the next several months, the Tulare County Tactical–High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Unit (or TNT-HIDTA) investigated these drug trafficking organizations further and developed more information about their operations up and down the state, as well as across state lines. Detectives quickly learned Tulare County was being used as a hub to traffic illegal drugs coming from Mexico. During these operations, more suspects were identified, more drugs were found, and more guns and cash were confiscated.

In October 2023, TNT-HIDTA and the DEA began working together on a larger scale operation naming it, "Operation SLO Ride".

In March, teams from across the state went after known drug traffickers in our area with direct ties to the Sinaloa Mexican Drug Cartel.

Of the 31 locations, 37 known drug traffickers were arrested; 22 will face federal charges related to narcotics and/or the sales of drugs, 15 will face state charges. Interviewing suspects in this cartel it was explained under the Biden-Harris Administration it is easier now in the last three years than in the history of the drug organization to move illegal drugs across the border into the United States.

In total, "Operation SLO Ride" netted 85 arrests (28 of which were federal), 955 pounds of meth, 6.5 kilos of cocaine, 64,020 fentanyl pills, 81 guns and \$640,476 in cash.

Back in June 2022, we saw the biggest fentanyl bust in my department's history, when Tulare County HIDTA investigators were called to an area on Highway 99 to help CHP Officers with a traffic stop.

During their investigation, Detectives with the Tulare County High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Unit (HIDTA) found 150 packages, each of 1,000 Fentanyl pills. In total, 150,000 pills were found hidden inside the vehicle. Each pill sells for approximately \$5, making the street value of the seizure \$750,000. Just one pill could be deadly.

Detectives arrested two men out of Washington who were later determined to be illegal immigrants. They faced charges of possession, transportation and sales of illegal drugs. They were booked into jail but let out the next day on their own recognizance and never showed up for their court dates. Detectives believe they were illegally transporting

fentanyl for the Mexican cartel over the southern border up to Washington. Their release, which I strongly disagreed with, was a slap in the face to the criminal justice system and a direct repercussion of failed immigration policies and an open border. There are drug traffickers, just like these two individuals running up and down our state every day. There are no ramifications for their actions. California has basically become an open territory for the cartel to do what it wants.

When it comes to the cartel, the destruction of our communities doesn't just stop at drug transportation. These cartels are infiltrating our communities, unleashing incredible violence, and taking the lives of innocent people.

On January 16th, 2023, TCSO Deputies were called to a home in Goshen for multiple shots fired. When Deputies arrived, they found six people shot to death execution-style, including a 16-year-old mother and her 10-month-old baby.

Detectives worked the case tirelessly and identified the killers as rival gang members. It appears this family was targeted and there are gang associations involved, as well as potential drug investigations. A week before the murders, TCSO Detectives conducted a narcotics search warrant at the victims' home. It's believed the suspects and some of the victims had ties to the cartel, due to their involvement with drug sales and transportation.

But it doesn't end there. We've had cases upon cases that trace back to Mexican drug cartels. Another one that stands out was "El Mano Negro". Jose Manuel Martinez was a gun for hire, collecting debts and killing people in California from 1980-2011. Martinez said he worked for Mexican drug cartels, and they called him El Mano Negro or The Black Hand. Martinez was responsible for the murders of 23-year-old David Bedolla in 1980, 30-year-old Sylvester Ayon in 1982, 22-year-old Raul Gonzalez of Earlimart also in 1982, Domingo Perez in 1985, 56-year-old Santiago Perez of Pixley in 2000, who was shot to death in his bed while his four children were home, 25-year-old Jose Alvarado in 2007, Juan Bautista Moreno in 2009, 45-year-old Joaquin Barragan of Earlimart in 2009 and Gonzalo Urquieta in 2011. The violence is a constantly rotating wheel.

But there is also the human trafficking aspect of open borders.

In 2016, what began with an interview between a female deputy and one underage female victim at a school, grew into the largest human trafficking investigation in Tulare County to date,

It single-handedly opened our eyes to what young people face here in Tulare County, across the country, and throughout the world.

We began with our largest human trafficking detail, Operation Baby Face, freeing more than 50 juvenile and adult victims, arresting three primary suspects and a dozen co-conspirators or johns. Since then, we have done annual details to arrest predators, johns, and human traffickers always with the goal to free more victims of human trafficking.

Since this operation, we have conducted countless similar operations, and typically, our open borders are a key element to the conspiracy.

We have also recently seen an uptick in Chinese Nationals coming across our southern border and being involved in either illegal massage parlors or financial scams.

We are currently working an investigation on an individual who is engaged in prostitution with Chinese immigrants coming into Los Angeles. This individual is running a local massage parlor, cycling through Chinese immigrants every few months operating in the Central San Joaquin Valley of California.

The massage parlor is posted on the dark web, and we became aware of it after we got called to a robbery there. As it turns out, it wasn't a robbery, it was a contract dispute between the owner and one of the workers.

Our Deputies were told the workers have work visas. But we have no evidence of that. At this point, it appears they're here illegally. This investigation is ongoing.

In regard to financial scams, these are hitting Tulare County hard. In these scams, someone reaches out to our victims and tells them their bank account has been compromised and they need to put their money into another account. The suspects are acting as if they're a security firm for the bank, convincing the victims to pull money out of their accounts. The suspects then steal the money from the account the victim transferred it into. The couriers being sent in these scams are typically Chinese nationals crossing the Mexico border illegally. It appears a Chinese food store and a Chinese Jewelry Store are fronts for the operation.

You might be surprised to know that our Agricultural Industry is also being impacted heavily by open borders. While we often think of the open border problem in relation to people entering the country illegally and the illegal trafficking of drugs and guns, we recently became aware of large equipment stolen in Tulare County being shipped to Mexico.

Since late February, more than half a million dollars' worth of large equipment, including backhoes, forklifts, farm tractors and excavators have been stolen from Tulare County farmers. Two pieces of the stolen equipment, a backhoe, and a forklift, are equipped with GPS. They were found to be mobile in Jalisco, Mexico.

After opening several investigations for stolen large equipment, our Ag Detectives were tipped off about an additional piece of equipment believed to be at the Loves Truck Stop in the city of Tulare. Deputies responded to the scene and contacted the occupants of a tractor trailer registered out of Chihuahua, Mexico. In it, deputies found multiple pieces of equipment loaded inside of the refrigerated tractor trailer destined for Mexico. The occupants of the truck were arrested and booked into the Adult Pre-Trial Facility for possession of stolen property and conspiracy.

The next day, detectives served a search warrant on their tractor trailer and found a stolen John Deere backhoe, valued at \$120,000; and a stolen Case 580 backhoe and a Bobcat Mini Excavator, together worth \$100,000.

Shortly afterward, our detectives located the staging area where stolen farm equipment was stored while waiting to be shipped to Mexico. This is not an isolated case. It is happening all over our county, and we are currently working another case where Mexican Nationals are stealing large agriculture equipment and shipping it illegally back to Mexico.

Our flawed border policies and the flood of illegal immigrants into this country has caused a major crisis in California and in America. We are seeing murders, marijuana grows, drug and human trafficking, financial scams, agricultural crimes, robberies and so much more. It is time that something is done to protect the people living here. Because as it stands now the anticipation of increased demands on law enforcement will soon deplete the ability to keep and maintain peace in our communities. The rest of the world is taking advantage of the current policies concerning our border. The world recognizes the Biden-Harris administration has removed the foundation of legal immigration. Allowing an unsecured border has encouraged the world to violate immigration laws. As a result, local law enforcement is overwhelmed with increases in demands for service to provide public safety.



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