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Testimony Before the U.S. House of Representatives Budget Committee

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Dear Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member Boyle, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to testify before you.

As a Senior Fellow at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, I bring 22 years of military experience and a deep understanding of border security from my time in the U.S. Army and U.S. Border Patrol. My roles have ranged from Infantry Officer in Operation Lone Star to Collateral Intelligence Agent and Marine Border Patrol Agent. I've been on the frontlines of combating drug trafficking and illegal immigration, and I have also coordinated efforts for border wall construction. My career has been dedicated to protecting our nation from threats at our international borders.

Today, we stand at a pivotal moment in the history of Texas, facing unprecedented challenges that threaten the very fabric of our state and nation. Texas shares a 1,254-mile border with a failing state, besieged by an authoritarian regime that not only sponsors terrorism but also allows cartels to wield a spectrum of warfare, undermining the rule of law and jeopardizing the safety of our communities.

These cartels, recognized as foreign terrorist organizations, have extended their nefarious operations beyond the border, infiltrating every major city and many towns across Texas. The threats we face are not isolated; they are intricately linked to global adversaries, including state actors like China, Russia, and Iran, and non-state entities such as Hezbollah, Hamas, MS-13, and Tren de Aragua.

The federal government's deliberate inaction has not only exacerbated the border crisis but has actively weaponized mass migration and disinformation to erode the very foundations of our sovereignty and stability. This manufactured humanitarian catastrophe has overwhelmed our federal agencies, leaving them unable to fulfill their primary mandate of protecting the American people. As a result, Texas has been left to fend for itself against an unrelenting invasion of complex and evolving threats that threaten the fabric of our society.

Despite their valiant efforts, our brave Texas law enforcement officers find themselves outgunned, outmaneuvered, and outfunded by the ruthless Mexican Cartels that have exploited the chaos at our border. The cartels, encouraged by the federal government's abdication of

responsibility, have transformed our border region into a lawless no-man's land where violence, trafficking, and despair reign supreme. Our men and women in uniform risk their lives daily to stem the tide of illegal immigration and protect our communities. Still, they cannot succeed without our government's support and resources.

We, the proud people of the Republic of Texas, have the right and the sacred duty to defend our nation and the values that have made us great. We cannot stand idly by as our border crisis metastasizes into a national catastrophe that threatens to unravel the very bonds that unite us as Americans. We must act with courage and conviction before it is too late to save our beloved state and our cherished way of life.

I stand here today as a Texan, as an American, to demand that our federal government fulfill its constitutional obligation to secure our borders and protect our people.

The Weaponization of Mass Migration: A Clear and Present Danger to the United States and Texas

The surge of illegal aliens at the southern border is not a mere humanitarian crisis but a deliberate strategy of weaponizing mass migration to undermine the sovereignty, security, and stability of the United States. This insidious form of hybrid warfare exploits the vulnerabilities of liberal democracies that are bound by international norms to protect refugees and asylum seekers. Disturbingly, it appears that the U.S. federal government under the Biden administration is now employing this tactic against its states, particularly Texas.

The Playbook of Weaponized Mass Migration

There are many examples of governments using this tactic against their adversaries, such as Cuba in the [1980 Mariel boatlift](#) and Iraq in the [1991 Kurdish exodus](#). States and nonstate actors have resorted to this tactic at least [81 times](#)—and possibly many more—since the advent of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which granted those fleeing political persecution the right to seek asylum in states that are signatories to the agreement.

In recent years, foreign adversaries have honed the art of weaponizing migration to destabilize target nations, as exemplified by the Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko's actions against the European Union in 2021. [Lukashenko executed this strategy](#) through a five-step process:

1. Encouraging migration: Lukashenko's regime lured foreign nationals from the Middle East and Africa to Belarus with false promises of easy EU entry. Belarusian state-owned travel agencies and airlines promoted "tourist visas" and organized flights to Minsk.
2. Facilitating border crossings: Belarusian forces guided the foreign nationals to the borders of Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, often providing them with tools to breach border fences. This deliberate funneling of foreign nationals to the borders created a humanitarian crisis and pressured the neighboring countries.
3. Instrumentalizing human suffering: Lukashenko exploited the foreign nationals' desperate situation to generate international attention and pressure the EU. Many foreign nationals

were left stranded in harsh conditions along the borders, with limited access to food, water, and shelter

4. Hybrid warfare tactics: The manufactured humanitarian crisis was part of Lukashenko's broader hybrid warfare strategy to destabilize the region and retaliate against EU sanctions imposed on Belarus. This tactic aimed to sow discord within the EU and undermine its unity.
5. Disinformation and propaganda: Belarusian state media and pro-Lukashenko outlets spread disinformation about the crisis, blaming the EU and neighboring countries for the foreign nationals' plight. This propaganda sought to shift responsibility away from the Belarusian regime and further manipulate the situation.

The weaponization of mass migration and the manufacturing of a humanitarian crisis by Lukashenko's regime strained the resources and border security of Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, as well as tested the EU's ability to respond to such hybrid threats. The crisis highlighted the vulnerability of these countries to politically motivated migration pressures and underscored the need for a coordinated EU response to counter such tactics. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, described the situation as “not a migration crisis” but a “hybrid attack.” She said, “This is an attempt by an authoritarian regime to try to destabilize its democratic neighbors. This will not succeed.”

The Biden Administration's Adoption of Weaponized Migration

Shockingly, the Biden administration has followed this same playbook to weaponize mass migration against border states like Texas:

1. **Encouraging migration:** The Biden administration has actively encouraged unprecedented levels of illegal immigration through a series of policies, agreements, and executive orders. The "[Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection](#)," signed in June 2022, laid the groundwork for a regional approach to migration that prioritizes "humanitarian protection" over border security and national sovereignty. In January 2023, the administration doubled down on this flawed approach with the "[Declaration of North America](#)" (DNA), a joint statement with Mexico and Canada that affirmed a commitment to "safe, orderly, and humane migration." However, the declaration's emphasis on expanding “legal” pathways is a thinly veiled attempt to normalize and facilitate mass migration, disregarding the rule of law and the integrity of our borders. The administration's policy agenda has been further shaped by executive orders like "Creating a Comprehensive Regional Framework to Address the Causes of Migration, To Manage Migration Throughout North and Central America, and To Provide Safe and Orderly Processing of Asylum Seekers at the United States Border" ([EO 14010](#)). Signed in February 2021, this order laid the groundwork for a more permissive approach to illegal immigration, focusing on addressing "root causes" and expanding access to asylum rather than deterring unlawful entry. These policies and agreements have been accompanied by public messaging from the President and top administration officials that have sent a clear signal to potential illegal aliens worldwide: the southern border is effectively open. By repeatedly emphasizing "compassion" and "humanity" over security and the rule of

law, the administration has given the green light to unprecedented numbers of foreign nationals attempting illegal entry into the United States.

2. **Facilitating border crossings:** In recent months, the Biden administration has taken unprecedented steps to facilitate illegal border crossings, effectively aiding and abetting the weaponization of mass migration against the United States. The Department of State has committed a staggering [\\$7.4 billion](#) to U.N. "migration and refugee assistance" agencies and NGOs, which is being used to encourage and enable illegal immigration. Under the CHNV parole program, the Department of Homeland Security has flown over [400,000](#) inadmissible aliens directly into the U.S. interior, bypassing normal immigration processes and border security measures. This represents a flagrant abuse of the parole authority, which is meant to be used sparingly on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit, not as a mass immigration tool. Moreover, the administration has diverted [\\$1.4 billion](#) in funding from constructing critical border barriers instead of prioritizing environmental policies and maintenance repairs. This decision has left vast stretches of the border unprotected, making it easier for illegal immigrants, drug smugglers, and potential terrorists to enter the country undetected. Compounding these actions, the administration has continued to implement catch-and-release policies, expanded alternatives to detention, and offered extensive taxpayer-funded benefits to illegal immigrants. These incentives have acted as powerful magnets for further illegal immigration, encouraging more people to undertake the dangerous journey to the southern border in hopes of being released into the U.S. interior. The combination of these policies has effectively opened the floodgates for illegal immigration.
3. **Instrumentalizing human suffering:** The Biden administration has allowed the border crisis to spiral out of control, with the U.N. now considering the US-Mexico border the [world's deadliest](#) migration land route due to the treacherous terrain, ruthless transnational criminal organizations and brutal Mexican cartels. [In 2022 alone, a record 853 migrants died](#) attempting to cross the border, a [52% increase](#) from 2021. This manufactured humanitarian catastrophe has overwhelmed the capacity of the U.S. Border Patrol and local communities, diverting critical resources and attention away from vital national security priorities. Consequently, the federal government's focus has shifted from securing the border to providing humanitarian relief, leaving border states, counties, and municipalities to bear the brunt of countering the myriad national security and public safety threats emanating from the border. This includes combating human trafficking, drug smuggling, and potential terrorist infiltration while also protecting American citizens and private property from the fallout of the crisis. Disturbingly, the administration appears to be exploiting the suffering of illegal immigrants as political pawns in a cynical gambit to reshape the nation's demographics and electoral landscape.

By overwhelming border communities with unmanageable waves of migration, the federal government is effectively outsourcing the costs and consequences of its reckless policies to states like Texas, which are left to grapple with the social, economic, and security implications of unchecked illegal immigration. The human toll of this instrumentalization of suffering is staggering, with illicit aliens falling victim to dehydration, exposure, drowning, and violence at the hands of cartels and smugglers. In

June 2022, [53 illegal aliens perished](#) from heat exhaustion in an abandoned tractor-trailer in San Antonio, the deadliest human smuggling incident in U.S. history. Such tragedies are the direct result of the Biden administration's policies that have incentivized and facilitated illegal border crossings, enriching criminal organizations while endangering countless lives. As the situation continues to deteriorate, it is clear that the federal government is not only failing in its fundamental duty to secure the nation's borders but is actively undermining the efforts of states like Texas to protect their citizens and territorial integrity. This dereliction of duty represents a profound betrayal of the public trust and a direct threat to our national sovereignty and security.

4. **Hybrid warfare tactics:** The Biden administration's weaponization of mass migration against Texas has reached alarming levels, amounting to a form of hybrid warfare that threatens the state's sovereignty, security, and resources. By deliberately flooding Texas with illegal immigrants and hamstringing its ability to defend its borders, the federal government has effectively ceded control of the border region to the ruthless Mexican cartels.

This abdication of responsibility has left Texas uniquely vulnerable, as approximately [95%](#) of the land along its 1,254-mile international border with Mexico is privately owned. This represents a significant portion of the U.S.-Mexico frontier, with Texas accounting for about [64%](#) of the total border length. The federal government's failure to secure this vast expanse has burdened state and local law enforcement agencies, private landowners, and ranchers. Over three years into this crisis, [55 Texas counties](#) have declared an invasion, and over 60 have issued disaster declarations.

Many county resolutions cite the invasion clauses of the U.S. Constitution, Articles IV, Section 4, which require the federal government to protect states from an invasion. They also cite Article IV, Section 7 of the Texas Constitution, which states the governor has the legal authority to command Texas military forces and call them up to “suppress insurrection and to repel invasions.”

Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), county sheriffs, and local law enforcement are now forced to serve as the first line of defense against the formidable threats posed by smuggling organizations, transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), and Mexican cartels. Since the launch of Operation Lone Star, the multi-agency effort has led to over [509,000](#) illegal immigrant apprehensions and more than [42,300](#) criminal arrests, with more than [37,500](#) felony charges. In the fight against the fentanyl crisis, Texas law enforcement has seized enough lethal doses of fentanyl to kill every man, woman, and child in the United States and Mexico combined during this border mission.

Texas has also [transported](#):

- Over 12,500 migrants to Washington, D.C., since April 2022
- Over 43,800 migrants to New York City since August 2022
- Over 35,600 migrants to Chicago since August 2022

- Over 3,400 migrants to Philadelphia since November 2022
- Over 18,600 migrants to Denver since May 18
- Over 1,500 migrants to Los Angeles since June 14

Though valiant in their efforts, Texas law enforcement is outgunned, outmaneuvered, and outfunded. The Texas Department of Public Safety cannot counter this hybrid threat environment alone.

The cartels, flush with billions in illicit profits and armed with military-grade weapons, have exploited the chaos at the border to expand their operations and tighten their grip on both sides of the frontier. As a result, private landowners and ranchers along the border have been left to fend for themselves, facing the constant threat of armed incursions, property damage, and violence. Many have been forced to arm themselves and invest in expensive security measures, becoming their first responders in the face of a relentless onslaught.

The Biden administration's refusal to address this crisis has not only jeopardized the safety and livelihoods of Texas residents but has also allowed the cartels to solidify their control over crucial smuggling corridors and expand their influence deep into the U.S. interior. This poses a grave threat to national security, as the cartels are known to collaborate with terrorist organizations and foreign adversaries seeking to infiltrate the United States.

5. **Disinformation and propaganda:** The Biden administration has engaged in a concerted campaign of disinformation and propaganda to undermine Texas' efforts to secure its border and protect its citizens from the devastating consequences of uncontrolled illegal immigration.

By falsely accusing Texas of human rights abuses and downplaying the immense costs and dangers of the border crisis, the administration seeks to erode public support for the state's legitimate security measures and impose extreme hypocrisy costs. Central to this campaign is the administration's use of lawfare, which involves weaponizing legal systems and international norms to achieve political objectives.

Recent examples include the [marine barrier case](#), in which the administration sued Texas for using buoys to deter illegal crossings, and the [Texas Border Wire case](#), a case brought by the state of Texas to stop Biden's CBP from destroying portions of a 29-mile section of concertina-wire ("c-wire") barriers erected by the state along the Rio Grande in Maverick County to deter illegal migrants.

In both instances, the administration sought to portray Texas' actions as violations of human rights and international law even though the state was acting within its sovereign authority under Article 4, Section 4 and Article 1, Section 10, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution, to protect its borders and prevent loss of life. By distorting these cases'

legal and moral context, the administration aims to paint Texas as a rogue state indifferent to human suffering and the rule of law.

The goal of this disinformation campaign is to generate national and international condemnation of Texas, mobilizing pressure on the state to abandon its efforts to secure the border. By portraying Texas as a pariah state that is violating human rights and international norms, the administration hopes to force the state to choose between enforcing its borders and maintaining its moral standing in the national community.

For example, on May 1, 2024, U.S. Representatives Greg Casar (TX-35), Joaquin Castro (TX-20), and 30 of their colleagues released [a letter](#) to the House Committee on Appropriations Homeland Security Subcommittee, urging them to direct federal agencies not to participate in or support the implementation of Operation Lone Star in Texas or similar efforts in other states in the Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations bill. They claim that “OLS is misappropriating the criminal justice system, wasting resources, contributing to broad harms, including increased racial profiling of border residents and the violation of their rights, and contributing to the injuries and deaths of scores of migrants and US citizens.”

This cynical use of lawfare and disinformation represents a direct assault on Texas' sovereignty and its ability to protect its citizens from the ravages of uncontrolled illegal immigration. By weaponizing hypocrisy costs and exploiting the bias of international institutions and media outlets, the administration seeks to undermine the state's resolve and erode public support for border security.

In this way, the Biden administration's actions are very similar to Russian and Belarusian orchestrated actions to use illegal aliens as a means of coercion to “influence the behavior of their targets by exploiting the existence of competing domestic interests within the target state(s) and by manipulating the costs or risks imposed on their civilian population(s).”

Vetting Failures, National Security Risks, and Policy Solutions

In the last three years, the United States has witnessed an alarming surge in illegal border crossings, with thousands of migrants arriving every day. Disturbingly, the current vetting and screening process for these illegal aliens is woefully inadequate, inconsistent, and in violation of federal law. This broken system not only undermines the rule of law but also exposes the nation to grave threats from criminals and terrorists.

The scale of the problem is staggering. In just [the first two days of May 2024](#), more Chinese nationals entered the U.S. illegally than in all of 2021. Despite this massive influx, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has [drastically simplified](#) the vetting process for Chinese illegal aliens, reducing the number of interview questions from roughly 40 to a mere five in April 2023. This reckless decision makes it easier for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to exploit our immigration system. It enables the administration to prioritize "processing

efficiency" over national security by pushing illegal aliens out of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody as quickly as possible.

Federal immigration law, specifically 8 U.S.C. § 1222(a), requires the government to detain all illegal aliens "for a sufficient time to enable the immigration officers and medical officers to subject such aliens to observation and an examination sufficient to determine whether or not they belong to inadmissible classes." However, U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) agents are circumventing this legal obligation by invoking [prosecutorial discretion under 8 C.F.R. § 287.3](#), which allows them to release illegal aliens into the U.S. without placing them in removal proceedings. This practice, known as "street releases," is witnessed in the San Diego Sector and other border areas.

The consequences of this lax vetting and screening process are dire. It creates loopholes and incentives for illegal aliens to enter the country illegally without proper documentation or verification, allowing criminals and terrorists to exploit the system and evade detection. The DHS has confirmed that some apprehended illegal aliens have [ties to transnational criminal organizations](#), such as Mexican cartels and transnational criminal organizations like Tren de Aragua, as well as links to terrorist groups like ISIS, Hezbollah, and al-Qaeda. These individuals seriously threaten national security, border security, homeland security, and public safety.

Recent incidents highlight the gravity of the situation. In April 2022, a [Colombian national](#) on the FBI watch list was mistakenly released due to Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents being overwhelmed by the increased flow of migrants. The DHS inspector general's report found that the agents couldn't follow standard protocols because they were too busy processing the surge of illegal aliens.

Another alarming case involves [Mohammad Kharwin](#), an Afghan illegal alien on the terrorist watchlist who spent nearly a year inside the U.S. after being apprehended and released by border patrol agents. Instead of being detained as a "special interest alien" until a thorough investigation could be completed, Kharwin was released on "Alternatives to Detention" (ATD) personal recognizance papers, allowing him to move freely within the country.

The March 2023 border riot in El Paso, Texas, further underscores the vetting failures. [Gabriel Enrique Angarita Carrasquero](#), a 22-year-old illegal alien from Venezuela accused of instigating the violent incident and assaulting a Texas soldier, remains at large in the U.S. after being released by Border Patrol under prosecutorial discretion, citing a lack of detention space.

These disturbing incidents are likely just the tip of the iceberg, with many more cases of accidental releases of terrorism suspects and members of transnational criminal organizations going unreported. The current vetting and screening process for illegal aliens at the border is not only unlawful but also dangerous, failing to uphold immigration law and protect the national interest.

The United States cannot afford to continue down this path of lax border security and inadequate vetting. The safety and well-being of the American people depend on swift and decisive action to secure our borders, enforce our laws, and protect our nation from the threats posed by illegal

immigration. It is time for policymakers to prioritize national security over political expediency and restore integrity to our immigration system.

Critical Infrastructure

The U.S.-Mexico is one of the world's most complex and dynamic regions, with millions of people, goods, and vehicles crossing it daily. Securing this border is a vital national interest, as it affects the country's safety, economy, and sovereignty. However, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the agency responsible for border security, has failed to achieve complete operational control of the border, which means it cannot prevent or detect all illegal entries.

The Texas-Mexico border is difficult to monitor the multitude of terrains along the Rio Grande River. Texas counties contiguous to the Mexico border encompass an area of 46,502 square miles or slightly larger than six US states (Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island). The vast geographical area produces immense challenges to the ability to combat border-centric criminal activity, and law enforcement does not have the manpower or the tools necessary to combat this criminal activity effectively.

Technology is essential in protecting Texas and the nation. Detection and surveillance technologies—video, cameras, and sensors—can provide real-time information on the exact locations of criminal exploitations. Since 1970, the United States Border Patrol (USBP) has employed sensor technology to assist law enforcement in remotely detecting the presence of illegal aliens entering the United States. However, according to the [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#) (GAO), these have been proven ineffective, unreliable, and costly.

For example, [GAO found that the ground sensors deployed by DHS have a high false alarm rate](#) and are often triggered by animals, weather, or vegetation. This reduces the border agents' situational awareness and response capabilities, so they must waste time and resources investigating each alarm. Moreover, DHS has not established performance measures or standards for these sensors, making assessing their effectiveness and efficiency difficult.

Similarly, [GAO found that the fences constructed by DHS have not been systematically evaluated for their impact on border security outcomes](#), such as apprehensions or deterrence. There is no evidence that the fences have reduced the flow of illegal crossings, as illegal aliens and smugglers have adapted to them using tunnels, ladders, cutting through them, or other methods. Furthermore, DHS has not developed a comprehensive plan to identify, prioritize, and address the maintenance and repair needs of the existing fencing, which could compromise its functionality and longevity.

Another example is the RVSS towers, fixed towers equipped with cameras and sensors that provide situational awareness to border agents. [GAO found these towers have experienced technical problems, such as poor image quality](#), limited coverage, and frequent outages. These problems reduce the visibility and accuracy of the border agents, who must rely on other information sources or physical inspection. Additionally, DHS has not fully implemented its

plans to upgrade and modernize the RVSS towers, which could improve their performance and capabilities.

[GAO has also reported that DHS has spent billions of dollars on border security programs like the ‘Secure Border Initiative’ \(SBI\) and initiatives](#) but has not consistently measured or reported their effectiveness, efficiency, or return on investment. For instance, GAO found that DHS has not developed or implemented a reliable method to estimate the total cost of border security, which could help inform resource allocation and budget decisions. Moreover, DHS has not established clear and consistent goals, objectives, and performance measures for its border security efforts, which could help assess progress and identify gaps or areas for improvement.

Faced with the challenge of dramatically increasing the effective use of detection technology along the entire border region, the State of Texas has implemented Operation Drawbridge. This groundbreaking initiative utilizes low-cost, commercial, off-the-shelf technology and a sophisticated in-house software monitoring system. This innovative approach has proven affordable, flexible, and highly effective in addressing the shortcomings of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) acquisition and use of technology at the border.

In January 2012, a [landmark Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) was signed between the Texas Department of Public Safety and the US Border Patrol, guiding the sharing of wildlife cameras and services per border security goals and principles. Initially, 350 cameras were deployed along the border and monitored using the Drawbridge software. Since then, Operation Drawbridge has forged strategic partnerships with the US Border Patrol, Border sheriffs' offices, and DPS assets, resulting in a sustained impact on Cartel narcotics and human smuggling.

From January 2015 to July 2020, these cameras have led to the seizure of [372,461 pounds](#) of drugs, the apprehension of [286,528 illegal aliens](#), and the arrest of hundreds of criminal gang members, including [91 MS-13](#) gang members in the Rio Grande Valley between October 2018 and July 2020. Texas has also incorporated Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) to enhance further the state's capability to protect critical infrastructure and detect and respond to border incursions, criminal smuggling attempts, and other incidents across the state.

The cameras are monitored round-the-clock by personnel at the DPS Border Security Operations Center (BSOC), DPS Joint Operations Intelligence Centers (JOICs), DPS communications facilities, and Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) dispatch centers. Real-time alerts and images are sent to participating law enforcement agencies in the areas where the cameras are deployed, enabling quick and efficient responses. This collaborative approach allows Border Patrol and local law enforcement agencies to leverage their core strengths in placing cameras in areas of detected trails and organizing rapid responses. Operation Drawbridge pioneered this technology in law enforcement, fostering a strategic, sustained team approach to combating border trafficking.

In addition to the technological advancements, Texas has also made significant progress in building a physical barrier along the border.

Governor Greg Abbott [stated](#), "If you look at the amount of wall already constructed and the amount of wall that's going to be under construction, Texas will have built more of the 'Trump wall' than even Trump built in the state of Texas." While former President Donald Trump constructed 458 miles of border wall across the nation's southern border, with 55 miles in Texas, the Lone Star State has already erected [23 miles of barrier](#). It has an additional 21 miles under construction, funded by state and private sources. As of December, at least [\\$55 million](#) in private donations have been dedicated to building the wall.

Border Metrics, Unmasking the Invisible Threat: Cartel Presence in Every Community

[The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017](#) (NDAA), enacted on December 23, 2016, was the first to codify border security metrics legally. Under this legislation, DHS mandates that 43 distinct measures be reported annually. Yet, these measures predominantly capture immigration statistics. By prioritizing immigration metrics, the border environment is viewed almost exclusively through the lens of immigration and migration. This limited perspective overshadows and thus undermines more extensive national security threats.

Consequently, the federal government has strategically framed the border crisis as mainly an immigration matter or humanitarian challenge. Within this context, border security effectiveness hinges on the tally of apprehensions, turnbacks, and gotaways, sidestepping broader security implications.

However, the border between the United States and Mexico is one of the world's most complex and dynamic regions. It is also one of the most dangerous, as the brutal war in Mexico has claimed over [300,000](#) lives since 2006. The violence perpetrated by the Mexican cartels has spilled over into the U.S. territory, affecting the security, economy, and quality of life of millions of Texans on the border and throughout the state.

The true extent and nature of this spillover violence remains unknown, mainly due to a glaring data gap that hinders our ability to measure, monitor, and respond to the threat posed by the cartels. The current data sources are inadequate, inconsistent, and unreliable, leaving us with a distorted and incomplete picture of the reality on the ground.

The primary data source on cartel-related crime and violence in the U.S. is the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, which collects and publishes crime statistics from over 18,000 law enforcement agencies nationwide. However, the UCR program has several limitations that undermine its usefulness for capturing the full scope of cartel activity.

First, the UCR program does not have a clear and consistent definition of what constitutes a cartel-related crime. Different agencies may use other criteria and methods to identify and classify such crimes, resulting in variations and discrepancies in the data. For example, some agencies may only report crimes directly linked to the cartels, while others may include crimes indirectly or potentially related to them. Some agencies may rely on intelligence or evidence to establish the connection, while others may use assumptions or speculations.

Second, the UCR program does not capture all the types and aspects of cartel-related crime and violence. The program only collects data on eight major categories of crimes, known as Part I offenses, which include murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. However, these categories do not cover many other forms of crime and violence that are commonly associated with cartels, such as kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking, money laundering, corruption, and intimidation. Moreover, the program does not collect data on the characteristics and circumstances of the crimes, such as the motives, methods, weapons, victims, perpetrators, and locations.

Third, the UCR program does not account for the underreporting and undercounting of cartel-related crime and violence. Many victims and witnesses of such crimes are reluctant to cooperate with law enforcement due to fear of retaliation or deportation. Many law enforcement agencies may also be unwilling to report such crimes due to lacking resources, capacity, or willingness.

The UCR program transitioned to a new data collection system, the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), on January 1, 2021. The NIBRS system is designed to provide more detailed and comprehensive data on crime incidents, including the crime's nature, context, consequences, and characteristics of the offenders, victims, and locations. The system also collects data on 24 additional categories of crimes, known as Part II offenses, which include some of the crimes relevant to cartel activity, such as drug offenses, fraud, gambling, and prostitution.

However, the NIBRS system is not without its challenges and limitations. Implementing and maintaining the system is more complex and costly, requiring more training, equipment, and personnel. Moreover, the system does not have a specific category or indicator for cartel-related crime, leaving the identification and classification of such crimes to the discretion and judgment of the reporting agencies.

One reason why it is difficult to understand how and where the Mexican cartels and TCOs operate in the U.S. is that NIBRS does not capture data on drug trafficking offenses, which are one of the main activities of the cartels. [According to the FBI](#), NIBRS collects data on 52 offenses, but none of them are specifically related to drug trafficking. Instead, NIBRS only records data on drug and narcotic violations, which are [defined as](#) "the unlawful cultivation, manufacture, distribution, sale, purchase, use, possession, transportation, or importation of any controlled drug or narcotic substance." This means that NIBRS does not distinguish between different types and levels of drug-related crimes, such as possession, distribution, or trafficking, nor does it indicate the source, destination, or quantity of the drugs involved. Therefore, NIBRS data may not reflect the full extent and impact of the Mexican cartels' U.S. operations, especially regarding their networks, routes, methods, and profits.

Another reason why it is difficult to understand how and where the Mexican cartels operate in the U.S. due to the limited scope of NIBRS is that NIBRS is not yet fully implemented and standardized across the country. Although the FBI has set a deadline of January 1, 2021, for all law enforcement agencies to transition to NIBRS, as of May 2023, [only 77%](#) of the U.S. population is covered by NIBRS-reporting agencies. This means there are still gaps and

inconsistencies in the national crime data collection and reporting system, which may affect the quality and comparability of the data. Moreover, some states and localities may have different definitions, classifications, and reporting practices for drug-related offenses, which may also affect the accuracy and reliability of the data. Therefore, NIBRS data may not provide a comprehensive and uniform picture of the Mexican cartels' presence and activities in the U.S., especially regarding their geographic distribution and variation.

The data gap on cartel violence has severe implications for our national security and public safety. Without reliable and comprehensive data, we cannot assess the magnitude and impact of the problem, identify the patterns and trends, evaluate the effectiveness of our policies and strategies, or allocate our resources and priorities. We are flying blind in the face of a formidable and evolving enemy.

We must close the data gap on cartel violence by developing and implementing a standardized and comprehensive data collection and reporting system that can capture the full spectrum and dimension of cartel activity in the U.S. Such a system should:

- Define and operationalize what constitutes a cartel-related crime based on clear and consistent criteria and indicators.
- Collect and report data on all types and aspects of cartel-related crime and violence, including the motives, methods, weapons, victims, perpetrators, and locations.
- Account for the underreporting and undercounting of cartel-related crime and violence by encouraging and facilitating the cooperation and collaboration of victims, witnesses, and law enforcement agencies.
- Integrate and coordinate data from multiple sources and levels, such as federal, state, and local agencies and intelligence, military, and international partners.
- Analyze and disseminate data promptly and transparently to inform and support decision-making, policy-making, and public awareness.

By closing the data gap on cartel violence, we can enhance our understanding and awareness of the border region and improve our ability and readiness to secure and protect it. We can also foster a more informed and balanced dialogue and debate on the issues and challenges facing the border and the solutions and opportunities available to address them.

Mexican Cartels

The Mexican cartels are not just criminal organizations that traffic drugs, weapons, and people across the U.S.-Mexico border. They are also hybrid threat adversaries that challenge the U.S. national security and interests by using a combination of political, military, economic, social, and information means and conventional, irregular, catastrophic, terrorism, and disruptive/criminal warfare methods. They may also collaborate with other state and non-state actors that share their goals or interests.

The Mexican Cartels are Foreign Terrorist Organizations

The Mexican cartels are Foreign Terrorist Organizations with networks of factions, cells, and affiliates that operate with varying degrees of autonomy and coordination in Mexico, Texas,

throughout the U.S., and worldwide. They constantly adapt to the changing environment and opportunities and employ conventional and unconventional methods to achieve their objectives. Some of the techniques they use include:

Conventional warfare: The Mexican cartels have access to sophisticated weapons and equipment, such as assault rifles, grenades, rocket launchers, armored vehicles, and drones. They use these weapons to engage in confrontations with the Mexican security forces, rival cartels, and vigilante groups. They also use them to intimidate and coerce the local populations and authorities and to protect their routes and territories.

The violent conflict between Mexican drug cartels and the government has continued unabated in recent years. Despite efforts by the Mexican military and police to crack down on cartel activity, the criminal organizations have only become more sophisticated and deadly in their tactics.

One recent example is the Sinaloa Cartel's use of advanced weaponry in Culiacán in October 2019. When authorities attempted to arrest Ovidio Guzmán López, the son of infamous cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, the cartel responded with overwhelming force. Heavily armed cartel members, some riding in armored vehicles, engaged in fierce gun battles with soldiers across the city streets.

The cartel fighters used a variety of military-grade weapons, including .50 caliber sniper rifles, grenade launchers, and truck-mounted machine guns. They also deployed drones rigged with explosives to attack security forces. The intense fighting left at least 13 people dead and over 20 wounded. Ultimately, authorities were forced to release Ovidio Guzmán to avoid further bloodshed.

The Culiacán battle highlighted the immense firepower and tactical capabilities of Mexico's cartels. They have access to a wide array of sophisticated weapons. These arms allow them to outgun and outmaneuver the Mexican military in many cases. The cartels also use these weapons to terrorize the civilian population, with beheadings, mass graves, and public displays of violence becoming all too common.

Despite the Mexican government's efforts to curb cartel violence, the conflict shows no signs of ending.

Irregular warfare: The Mexican cartels, while capable of engaging in direct combat with security forces, more frequently employ a variety of irregular warfare tactics to further their objectives. These tactics include ambushes, targeted killings, kidnappings, extortion, and bombings. A tragic example occurred on the morning of April 26, 2024, when journalist Roberto Carlos Figueroa was abducted after dropping his children off at school. Despite his family paying the demanded ransom, Figueroa's lifeless body was later discovered in a car in the southern Mexican state of Morelos.

Kidnapping for ransom is a prevalent tactic employed by the cartels to generate income. They frequently target affluent businesspeople, politicians, and the families of rival cartel members. Victims are held captive in undisclosed locations and subjected to torture until the ransom is paid.

Extortion is another profitable criminal enterprise for the cartels. They extort regular payments from businesses, often threatening violence if their demands are not met. Non-compliance can lead to arson attacks, bombings, or the murder of the business owner and their family. The cartels have even infiltrated the highest echelons of government, extorting money from politicians and officials.

Targeted killings are a common occurrence, with the cartels mercilessly eliminating anyone who poses a threat to their operations. Journalists who report on cartel activities, activists who speak out against the violence, and law enforcement officers who attempt to curb the drug trade have all been targeted for assassination.

Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries for journalists in the Western Hemisphere. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) annual Global Impunity Index, Mexico consistently ranks among the top 10 countries with the highest number of unsolved journalist murders. CPJ has also found that Mexico has the highest number of disappeared journalists worldwide. Yet, not a single case of a missing journalist in Mexico has ever resulted in a conviction.

How and Why the Mexican Cartels Operationally Control the U.S. Border and Pose a Threat to the U.S.

The US-Mexico border is not only a physical barrier but also a battleground for a covert war between the Mexican cartels and the U.S. authorities. The cartels have devised a cunning strategy to evade detection and prosecution by creating a "sanitary zone" inside the Texas border, where they can operate with impunity and use the local population as their pawns. The cartels exploit the legal loopholes and the social vulnerabilities of the border communities, especially the minors and the gangs, to smuggle drugs, weapons, money, and people across the border. The cartels also employ sophisticated technology, such as drones, to monitor and evade law enforcement agencies. The result is a humanitarian and security crisis that threatens the stability and prosperity of both nations.

The consequences of this cartel control are devastating for both sides of the border. The cartels are responsible for countless atrocities and abuses against illegal aliens, including rape, torture, kidnapping, extortion, and murder. The cartels also pose a grave threat to the national security of the U.S., as they smuggle not only drugs but also weapons, money, and potential terrorists into the country. The cartels have also infiltrated and corrupted the local authorities and institutions along the border, undermining the rule of law and our constitutional republic.

The Mexican cartels operate in the U.S. by smuggling drugs across the border and distributing them through various networks and associates, such as gangs, dealers, and couriers. According to the [DEA](#), the Mexican cartels control most of the illicit drug market in the U.S., and they are

responsible for the supply of cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, marijuana, and fentanyl. The Mexican cartels also engage in other criminal activities in the U.S., such as money laundering, kidnapping, extortion, and murder.

The Mexican cartels use different methods and routes to transport drugs into the U.S., such as tunnels, vehicles, boats, planes, drones, and human carriers. They also exploit the legal ports of entry by hiding drugs in cargo, containers, or passenger vehicles. The DEA estimates that the southwest border is the main entry point for most of the drugs coming from Mexico, especially in the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

The Mexican cartels have established alliances and partnerships with various U.S.-based criminal groups, such as street gangs, prison gangs, outlaw motorcycle gangs, and domestic drug trafficking organizations. These groups act as intermediaries, distributors, or enforcers for the cartels, and they receive drugs, money, or weapons in exchange for their services. Some of the most notorious U.S. gangs that work with the Mexican cartels are Tren de Aragua, the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), the Barrio Azteca, the Sureños, the Norteños, and the Hells Angels.

The Mexican cartels also have cells or operatives in the U.S. who are responsible for overseeing, coordinating, or facilitating drug trafficking operations. These cells or operatives may include cartel members, relatives, associates, or hired hands who act as managers, brokers, transporters, stash house operators, or hitmen. The DEA identifies several U.S. cities where the Mexican cartels have a significant presence or influence, such as Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Atlanta, and Houston.

The Mexican cartels pose a severe threat to U.S. national security, to every community, and to law enforcement, as they contribute to the drug abuse epidemic, the overdose deaths, the violence, and the corruption in the country.

Immigrant Communities

Communities like Colony Ridge in Texas portray microcosms of a macroscopic issue that hides in plain sight across the United States.

The surge of illegal aliens at the U.S.-Mexico border has been widely reported as a humanitarian and security crisis. But there is another aspect of this phenomenon that deserves more attention: how Mexican cartels and transnational criminal organizations exploit and terrorize immigrant communities in the U.S. through fear tactics and violence.

The Mexican cartels and TCOs like Tren de Aragua do not stop at the border. They extend their reach and influence into the U.S. territory, where they prey on vulnerable immigrant communities, especially those who are undocumented or have precarious legal status. They use various methods to control and extort these communities, such as:

- Threatening to expose or deport them to immigration authorities if they do not pay a ransom or a regular fee.
- Forcing them to work as drug couriers, money launderers, or sex workers.

- Kidnapping, torturing, or killing their relatives in Mexico or Central America if they do not cooperate or comply with their demands.
- Recruiting or coercing their children to join their ranks as gang members or assassins.⁵

These practices have devastating consequences for the immigrant communities, who live in constant fear, isolation, and trauma. They also undermine the rule of law, public safety, and social cohesion in the U.S., as the cartels and TCOs create parallel structures of power and governance that challenge legitimate authorities and institutions.

Dossiers from National Geographic's docuseries 'Underworld Inc.' episodes, notably '[Human Cargo](#),' manifest a glimpse into the dark liaisons between Mexican Cartels and these enclave communities.

'Human Cargo' spotlights Houston, where journalists entrenched with the Sinaloa Cartel unravel a tapestry of underworld control over socioeconomic dynamics, cultural levers, and governance mechanisms. The cartel's grip extends to every societal segment, the grim narrative of a trafficked young girl serving as a chilling testament.

The U.S. cannot afford to ignore or underestimate the threat that the cartels and TCOs pose to its national security and interests, as well as to the human rights and dignity of the immigrant communities. It is time to act decisively and effectively to confront and combat this menace.

China

Derek Bernsen has [suggested](#) that “[t]he U.S. is already at war, and Great Power Competition is that war.” However, China and Russia know that a direct military confrontation with the United States would be unwise.²⁶ Therefore, they compete below the level of armed conflict by applying national power through other means. Conventional military power still matters greatly, but states—particularly nuclear-capable states—exercise their coercive power indirectly. In a sense, irregular warfare is no longer an adjunct to conventional military power. Instead, as Devin Knoll and others [suggest](#), strategic competition requires an amalgamation of irregular and traditional warfare because irregular warfare frames conventional capabilities.

China is seeking to integrate instruments of national power including economics, demographics, information, cyber, and command and because Chinese doctrine views the use of non-military sources of energy as essential to victory in a conventional [conflict](#).” As [discussed](#) in Unrestricted Warfare, “there is nothing in the world today that cannot become a weapon, and this requires that our understanding of weapons must have an awareness that breaks through all boundaries.” For [example](#) “a single man-made stock-market crash, a single computer virus invasion, or a single rumor or scandal that results in a fluctuation in the enemy country on the Internet, all can be included in the ranks of new-concept weapons.” These are “still weapons in the narrow sense” because they are “[capable](#) of inflicting material or psychological casualties on an enemy.” And they are capable of inflicting casualties because they “are closely linked to the lives of the common people.” [The authors](#) of Unrestricted Warfare suggest that “people will awake to discover with surprise that quite a few gentle and kind things have begun to have offensive and

lethal characteristics.” As a result, it has been [suggested](#) that the United States needs to “increase awareness of the second-order consequences of subtle activities that may not register on a Western military planner’s day-to-day radar, and of the strategic impact that the PLA intended without escalating to war.”

The [weaponization of mass migration](#) is precisely this sort of gray zone activity that falls below the traditional threshold of open warfare but has substantial potential to disrupt, destabilize, or coerce countries, and in this case, States like Texas, without necessarily (or likely) drawing a military response.

The U.S. opioid crisis is not only a public health emergency but also a national security threat. Behind the scenes, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is weaponizing the Mexican cartels in the U.S. by supplying them with precursor chemicals and synthetic drugs, such as fentanyl, that are used to produce and traffic deadly opioids across the border. The CCP is also facilitating the money laundering and financial transactions of the cartels by using Chinese banks, businesses, and networks to move and hide their illicit profits. The CCP is exploiting the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the U.S. drug market, border security, and law enforcement by enabling and empowering the cartels to poison and harm the American population and by undermining U.S. national security and interests.

A [2018 article](#) from the Trumpet explained that “By turning a blind eye, at the very least, to Chinese fentanyl traffickers, the Chinese government enjoys the benefit of waging drug warfare against the Americans and weakening them. A Chinese military attack using actual chemical weapons would risk an overwhelming military response, but using the chemical weapon of illicit drugs is a subtle siege that tears at the fragile fabric of American society by attacking not its strategic vulnerabilities but its moral ones. America's self-inflicted and China-facilitated fentanyl epidemic is ripping apart families, multiplying crime, crippling the economy, and destroying the minds of the next generation of Americans.”

The CCP's strategy of drug warfare is not new nor unique to the U.S. China has a long history of using drugs as a tool of political and economic domination, dating back to the Opium Wars in the 19th century, when the British Empire forced China to open its ports and markets to opium imports, resulting in widespread addiction and social unrest among the Chinese people. The CCP's founder, Mao Zedong, famously declared that "drug warfare, obtaining sudden and huge profits by spreading disaster in other countries" was one of the "three great campaigns" of the Chinese revolution, along with guerrilla warfare and propaganda warfare. The CCP has also been accused of supporting and arming communist insurgencies and terrorist groups in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa by providing them with drugs and weapons in exchange for loyalty and influence.

The CCP leadership's chemical and political warfare against the U.S. coincides with a surge in the number of Chinese illegal aliens crossing the southern border without authorization. According to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, more than 10,000 Chinese unlawful aliens have been apprehended since October 2022, compared to less than 500 in the same period in 2021. This increase may be attributed to various factors, such as the economic and social

uncertainties and the limited personal freedoms in China, the demand for cheap labor, and the availability of smugglers in the U.S. However, some of these illegal aliens may also be victims of labor and sex trafficking, lured by false promises of jobs and opportunities in the U.S.

The [CCP](#) leadership has also operated covert police stations in several U.S. cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Houston. These stations are staffed by volunteers who claim to provide services to Chinese nationals living abroad, such as renewing their driver's licenses or passports. However, they are part of the CCP's overseas repression operations, aimed at locating, intimidating, and silencing dissidents, activists, and critics of the regime. The FBI recently arrested two men who were running a secret Chinese police station in Manhattan, accusing them of conspiring to act as agents of the CCP and obstructing the investigation. [The FBI](#) also warned that these stations may threaten U.S. national security, sovereignty, and law enforcement, as they violate the principle of non-intervention and circumvent the standard judicial and diplomatic processes. They also undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the U.S. government and its institutions, creating divisions and conflicts among Americans.

The [CCP police stations](#) are part of the CCP's broader strategy of hybrid warfare, which involves using various means of coercion, pressure, and destabilization against the U.S. and its allies, such as cyberattacks, espionage, disinformation, and weaponized migration. These tactics are designed to exploit the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of the U.S. and its allies and to erode their trust and confidence in their systems and values.

These trends indicate that the CCP leadership is waging unrestricted warfare against the U.S., using various methods to undermine its national security, sovereignty, and values. The U.S. government and the public should be aware of the dangers posed by the CCP and take appropriate measures to counter its malign influence and protect its interests and allies.

Texas Legislation

Texas has spent over [\\$11 billion](#) throughout two legislative sessions to address the crisis and chaos caused by the Biden administration's handling of the border situation. To combat the issue, Governor Abbott recently signed several bills to strengthen border security measures and support local law enforcement agencies.

The first bill, [SB 1900](#), designates Mexican cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) under state law, building upon an executive order issued by the governor last September. This designation allows for higher penalties for crimes related to drug trafficking and stash house operations and enables FTOs to be added to law enforcement intelligence databases. Additionally, local entities can now seek public nuisance claims against FTOs in their communities.

Next, Governor Abbott signed [SB 1484](#), which authorizes the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) to train local law enforcement officials on cartel-related activity and effective tactics for combating border crimes. The bill also requires DPS to identify ways local law enforcement can

assist in securing the border. It expands collaborative efforts through Operation Lone Star, Texas' border security mission.

[SB 423](#) was also signed into law, clearly authorizing the Texas Military Department to use drones for border security. Furthermore, SB 1403 allows the governor to develop and execute an interstate compact for border security among interested states without requiring Congressional approval.

To provide relief for farmers and ranchers in border and rural counties, the Governor signed [SB 1133](#), which creates a grant program to compensate property owners for damages caused by criminal activities on agricultural land. The law allows Texas ranchers to receive up to \$75,000 in reimbursement per incident.

Lastly, [SB 602](#) was signed into law, authorizing U.S. Border Patrol agents to arrest individuals for committing Texas crimes. This bill was a response to a request made by Border Patrol to the state of Texas, granting them additional tools to secure the border, including powers of arrest and search and seizure for felony offenses under Texas law when the incident occurs at a port of entry or Border Patrol checkpoint.

Conclusion

Distinguished members of this committee, I stand before you today to address the dire situation at our southern border and the urgent need for decisive action to protect our citizens and preserve our way of life.

The threats we face from Mexican cartels have reached unprecedented levels, extending far beyond the border and infiltrating every major city and town across Texas. These cartels, now recognized as foreign terrorist organizations, have forged alliances with global adversaries, including state actors like China, Russia, and Iran, and non-state entities such as Hezbollah, Hamas, MS-13, and Tren de Aragua. These threats' complex and evolving nature demands our unwavering attention and resolute action.

Regrettably, the federal government's deliberate inaction has not only exacerbated the border crisis. Still, it has actively weaponized mass migration and disinformation to erode the very foundations of our sovereignty and stability. This manufactured humanitarian catastrophe has overwhelmed our federal agencies, rendering them unable to fulfill their primary mandate of protecting the American people. Consequently, Texas has been left to fend for itself against an unrelenting invasion that threatens the fabric of our society.

Our brave Texas law enforcement officers, despite their valiant efforts, find themselves outgunned, outmaneuvered, and out funded by the ruthless Mexican Cartels that have exploited the chaos at our border. Encouraged by the federal government's abdication of responsibility, these cartels have transformed our border region into a lawless no-man's land where violence, trafficking, and despair reign supreme. Our men and women in uniform risk their lives daily to

stem the tide of illegal immigration and protect our communities. Still, they cannot succeed without our government's full support and resources.

We, the proud people of the Republic of Texas, have the right and the sacred duty to defend our nation and the values that have made us great. We cannot stand idly by as our border crisis metastasizes into a national catastrophe that threatens to unravel the very bonds that unite us as Americans. We must act with courage and conviction before it is too late to save our beloved state and our cherished way of life.

To all mothers, fathers, and loved ones who have lost someone to these cartels, you are not forgotten. With steadfast commitment, I stand before you today, knowing there can be no appeasement or reasoning with this evil. This is a fight between good and evil, and we must marshal our collective will and direct the full force of our national power to confront these organizations. The time for half-measures and fragmented efforts has passed. Now is the moment for decisive and unwavering action to restore safety and security to our communities.

In closing, I implore this body to commit to the utmost priority of protecting our citizens. The future of our great nation depends on our focus against this common enemy. May history remember this day as an essential moment when our nation united in a resounding decree to end the Mexican cartels, protect American citizens, and secure a brighter future for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to addressing your questions.