

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM  
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**Opening Statement**

**Jeff Flake**  
**Ranking Member**  
**National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee**

**Hearing on**  
**“Money, Guns, and Drugs: Are U.S. Inputs Fueling Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border?”**

**March 11, 2009**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Being a representative from a border state, this is an issue that hits close to home. I thank you for holding this hearing and addressing these very important matters.

In recent years, Mexican towns bordering the United States have experienced an exponential growth in violence. The fighting, chiefly the result of drug cartels warring with each other and the Mexican government, has cost 7,000 Mexican lives within the past year alone. President Calderon is making a concerted effort to quell the violence. It does not appear, however, that the hostility will cease in the near term.

On the contrary, reports indicate that this violence may be spreading. Despite conflicting reports about how large these cartels actually are and whether this violence has already spilled into the U.S., violence in Mexico is a serious issue that is ripe for this Subcommittee's review.

The purpose of this hearing is to examine the ways in which the U.S. is fueling this violence. In other words, the majority proposes to explore how Americans are to blame.

The witnesses will testify that America's insatiable appetite for drugs and accessibility to weapons are the source of the violence. While I agree that cross-border sales of guns and drugs play a part, I do not believe that stricter gun controls on Americans and public service announcements will solve the problem.

Indeed, we must open the discussion to a broader spectrum of ideas. Foremost, the U.S. must focus on enforcing good laws on the books. In my home state of Arizona, it is illegal to directly or indirectly sell weapons to criminals. Plain and simple. The same is true under federal law.

Instead of punishing law-abiding Americans with stricter controls, we must continue to punish those who break the law. In fact, U.S. law enforcement has had tremendous success in this area.

This Tuesday, a senior Immigration and Customs Enforcement official testified before another Congressional committee. She said that in the last three and one half years, ICE has made a concerted effort to focus on border security. In this period, the agency made 4,830 arrests, seized nearly 170,000 pounds of drugs, and captured numerous weapons at or near the border.

State-side operations are working.

The enactment of comprehensive immigration reform would also make easier the legitimate movement of workers and goods between the United States and Mexico. This would free law enforcement resources to be redirected to more pressing crimes which potentially endanger our citizens.

We must determine the extent to which U.S.-funded anti-drug programs are succeeding in Mexico. To date, we have spent billions in that effort.

Instead of limiting the discussion to gun control and treatment programs, we must have a broad discussion of ideas.

To that end, I have invited Arizona State Senator Jonathan Paton to testify today. He is a seasoned official in the Arizona legislature and a life-long resident of Arizona. He is thoroughly familiar with these matters and a leader in promoting legislative solutions to the cross-border issues. Thus, Senator Paton provides a unique perspective about ways in which border states, such as Arizona, are tackling these important matters.

We can agree that despite our best efforts to fight cartel operations on both sides of the border, violence has gotten worse. That said, serious dialogue must take place between lawmakers and experts about real solutions that bolster security while protecting our rights. Anything less is counterproductive. Sadly, this hearing appears to be more of a discussion about stricter gun controls on Americans than it is about punishing those who break the law.

In our discussions today, we must take care to note that Mexico is not a failed state, as national rhetoric might suggest. I believe that such characterizations are unhelpful at a time when our friends are going through tough times. President Calderon has taken bold steps to rid his country of corruption. I applaud his efforts and wish him every success.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this very important hearing today. These issues not only affect my home state of Arizona, but also the security of the United States. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.