



Remarks by Secretary Napolitano at the Border Security Conference



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Secretary Napolitano: It is great to be back home, back in the West where I was raised not far from here in Albuquerque. I used to have a summer job outside of Alamogordo so I feel like I am, in many respects, back home.

I may have moved to Washington, D.C., recently, but not a day goes by in my new post that I don't think about the border and the unique set of challenges and opportunities that we have here both for our country and for our friends and partners in Mexico.

As the Congressman [Silvestre Reyes of Texas] said, I have been involved in border issues directly now for more than 15 years as the U.S. Attorney, as a state Attorney General, a border state Governor, and now Homeland Security Secretary. And over this period, I think it is fair to say that our shared challenges have evolved.

So let me be very clear with you here today. I am here to tell you that in this Administration in the eight months, almost eight months now since President Obama's inaugural, we too have changed, we too have involved, and we are meeting the full range of challenges and opportunities of this border area.

We have a strong partner in President Calderón and my colleague, Secretary Gómez-Mont, and the entire Mexican government. We have embraced that partnership. We have strengthened it, and we are building upon it. And we are fighting together this fight, together with the government of Mexico and also along with agencies across the United States federal government and our state, local, tribal and territorial partners.

And we're not just fighting a fight. And when I say a fight, let me describe what I mean. What I mean is that we have a unique opportunity now with Mexico to really break up these cartels, and shame on us if we don't take full advantage of that opportunity and go through that window together, and that is one of the fights that we are fighting.

But for the past eight years or so, the federal government's approach to the Southwest border was to treat it as a problem set and to treat it as something to be dealt with separately from our nation's broader challenges with immigration, security, counternarcotics enforcement and international relations.

In essence—and in some instances quite literally—the issue of the Southwest border was walled off from other issues and dealt with as a discrete entity. Well, let me tell you, the issues we have with the Southwest border are not discrete and separate. They are related to all of the other issues I just named.

So our approach is to view Southwest border security along with immigration—or enforcement of the immigration laws in the interior of the country—counternarcotics enforcement and streamline citizenship processes together. These things are inextricably linked. You can't address one without addressing all.

So we're taking a common-sense, comprehensive look at both new and old programs to ensure that we have the most effective approach possible. Now in some instances, that means that we are continuing things that were initiated in the past. Why? Because some say why don't you just discard everything that was done in the past?

Well, because when you look at some of these things and you look at them carefully, and you look at them in the context of what we are trying to accomplish, in other words, linking things together, we find that they are consistent with our values and they make sense from a law enforcement perspective.

In other areas where function and utility have gone awry, we have taken steps to fix it. And when we have seen things that didn't make sense at all, we have eliminated them, and we have started, as the Congressman mentioned, a number of programs on our own.

But the overall approach is very, very different. It is more strategic, it's more cooperative, more multilateral, and in the long run, it will be more effective. And it begins with the paradigm that you cannot segregate the Southwest border from the rest of our nation,

nor can we segregate our efforts on the Southwest border from the efforts and the partnership we must have with Mexico.

So as I said from the start, as we make this shift, one of the things we also know is that we cannot as a federal agency do this by ourselves. You cannot just say the Southwest border, it's off over here—I'm talking Washington-speak now, okay? It's over here, and DHS will deal with all of it. That's not the right way to approach it. We have shared responsibilities here that we must appreciate.

So for that reason, I'm pleased to announce today that we're putting an additional \$30 million into Operation Stonegarden for the Southwest border. This is a program that helps border counties, border cities, border towns, deal with border-related crimes.

Now this builds on \$45 million we already deployed to the Southwest border this spring, so for you law enforcement folks in the audience, what this means is that in the past eight months, almost 85 percent of all Stonegarden money nationally has gone right here to the Southwest border. You can clap for that. That's okay.

So, with that done, let me talk about our integrated strategy and our integrated paradigm for border security that relies on addressing border security along with interior enforcement, along with a counternarcotics strategy and a streamlined process for citizenship. Citizenship in [inaudible] accord with, let me be very clear, what we're doing is cleaning out some of the paperwork backlog that has gotten in the way of those who are seeking to become citizens legally in our country.

Now, border security. As I said in my intro, at the top of our border security mission is working to combat the violence by the Mexican-based drug cartels. We have to contain it. We have to reduce it.

Now much of the violence we've seen recently, as you all have discussed, and I know you heard from the mayor of Juarez earlier, is part of a campaign that started in the Calderón Administration, and that has by its own success limited the battleground that the cartels have to fight over.

And as they seek to maintain this ground, the cartels have battled each other, and their smuggling channels have become more constricted. And so as they battle each other, as they battle for territory, they have caused more than 12,000 deaths in Mexico, hundreds of those among law enforcement. And those deaths continue.

Now we haven't seen anything near that in the United States, and our progress and our process over the past months has been to bolster our efforts here at the border to make sure we don't see what we would call spillover violence, to support Mexico in its efforts. These smuggling organizations are transnational by nature. And so because they are transnational, this effort has received the highest level of attention in the Obama Administration.

The President, the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy and I have all visited Mexico, some multiple times, over the past six months. As was mentioned, we were just in Guadalajara where President Obama reiterated his support to President Calderón in the most specific way, as did Prime Minister [Stephen] Harper of Canada.

Now the international partnerships that have grown out of these meetings are unprecedented in the history of the United States and Mexico. Because for really the first time, our countries are treating this issue of the drug cartels and border-related violence as a shared problem. The drugs that the drug cartels have are flowing north, and the guns and the cash that are fueling their efforts are flowing south.

So to take full advantage of this cooperation, we are working to impede the supply of guns and cash going into Mexico, and the government of Mexico is committing not just civilian but active duty military and federal police to suppress the drug cartels.

Let me be specific. In the past six months, we have added hundreds of agents and deployed additional technology to the border. We've doubled the number of agents that ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] has assigned to the border enforcement security teams, which include American, Mexican, state, local, tribal law enforcement agents working together to crack down on smuggling. We have tripled the number of DHS intelligence analysts working on the Southwest border.

We have doubled the number of DHS agents collaborating on looking for and apprehending violent criminal aliens, and we have, as you know, ramped up southbound inspections to search for illegal weapons and cash, adding mobile X-ray machines, license plate readers, more Border Patrol agents, and K-9 detection teams to that effort. For the first time we have begun inspecting all southbound rail shipments into Mexico.

On the other hand, the government of Mexico has created for the first time a customs service to focus on border security while balancing the need to facilitate trade. It is now training its federal law enforcement officers on investigative and intelligence techniques to facilitate more rapid interdiction of Mexican felons. It is deploying federal police to the most vulnerable sections of the U.S.-Mexico border. It is exchanging in real time law enforcement information to enable us in real time to better track the movements of wanted fugitives, and it is extraditing more wanted felons than at any point in our two nations' history so that they can be prosecuted in the United States.

This goes well beyond what has been done in the past by their government or ours, and it has resulted in the following. We've seized

just in the past few months \$69 million in cash, 2.4 million pounds of drugs, more than 95,000 rounds of ammunition, more than 500 assault rifles and handguns—and that is an increase of over \$34 million in seizures, 400,000 kilos [more than 800,000 pounds] in drugs, and more than 57,000 rounds of ammunition. In other words, it's not just that we're seizing, but we're seizing materially more than we did at this point last year.

Now on top of these efforts, we are improving the infrastructure along this border so that we can more effectively fight the illegal immigration, the human smuggling that so often is not done by the same groups, but is related to the routes for illegal narcotics.

We are preparing now to deploy new technology. You've heard of the SBInet, because you are all here on the border and you know that it had some false starts, but it is now meeting all of its testing specifications, and we are getting ready to actually deploy it in the Tucson Sector, which parenthetically is the sector of the border where the most illegal activity is now occurring.

And of course, in addition to all of the other things I have detailed, we are continuing our mission of enforcing the nation's immigration laws and interdicting illegal immigration. ICE has made 181,000-plus arrests of illegal nationals thus far in 2009. That's a six percent increase compared with the same period two years ago, and has conducted almost 215,000 total removals of illegal nationals thus far in 2009—a 25 percent increase over two years ago.*

As I said when I met with a number of our CBP [U.S. Customs and Border Protection] personnel earlier this morning, and let me be clear about this, I know there is a national interest and a desire to amend our nation's immigration laws. I share in that. I have supported that in the past. But our job is to enforce the laws that we have now, to do it intelligently, to do it with well trained professionals who are well supervised. We will enforce this law smartly and intelligently, and if and when, and I believe it is when the law changes, we will be prepared to enforce that law as well.

But we can't do that with only taking effective action at the border. We have to, like I said before, recognize that what happens at the border affects Kansas City. What happens in Kansas City affects the border. And you see this most clearly in the issue of worksite enforcement. Our look at worksite enforcement is as follows. That we need to make sure that worksite enforcement is done, it is done intelligently, it is done well, but it is done in such a fashion that the employers who themselves are benefiting from [inaudible] workers maintain a legal workforce. [E-Verify] is easy to use. You can do it, basically, from your computer. It is very accurate. 97 percent of job applicants are immediately verified and the database it has only continues to improve. Employers are signing up now at the rate of over a thousand a week. I think that will only speed up.

So in order to look at the issue of the border, you have to think of it this way. It is stopping illegal narcotics. It is interdicting illegal immigration, and you might think of that as supply, but you also then have to think of what the demand is. The demand is primarily for drugs, and you've heard or will hear from our drug czar and our plans to reduce that demand. But from the DHS point of things, the demand for illegal labor and the demand and the realization that reducing that demand is, itself, part of border security.

Another area I would like to touch upon is what we've done with 287(g). I asked a group of law enforcement this morning at breakfast about 287(g). Nobody had really heard of it, but it has caused an enormous uproar in the press across the country. So let me be very clear what 287(g) is and how we are going to use it.

287(g) is a program, a law that was instituted during the Clinton Administration, that gives state and local law enforcement the ability to enforce immigration laws. Previously, only federal agents could do that. You have to do that. There has to be a signed agreement with the federal government for 287(g) to be in effect.

Prior to 287(g) agreements, quite frankly, did not have any accountability built in nor do they have any priorities built in. And so for the agencies that had them, there really was a carte blanche to do whatever they wished. I believe that 287(g) is a powerful tool that we will continue to use as part of this theme that everything is inextricably linked and we have partnerships. But it must have priorities and it must have accountability.

So the basic agreements have been rewritten and reprioritized to focus on using them in jails and prisons, where we know we have illegal immigrants who have already violated our criminal laws, and Fugitive Alien Task Forces, as we find those who have already been convicted who are fugitives from justice and we seek to bring them to justice. So those revised agreements are now in the field and we are looking forward to continuing the 287(g).

So partnerships with Mexico, more partnerships with state and local law enforcement as we look at how things are linked together, continued now with better and more targeted and strategic work-site enforcement—that all goes together.

Another change that has taken place in the last six months is the issue of what do we do with this who we have seized and we have detained. This is important. When we talk about the rule of law, we have a responsibility to make sure that those who are detained and held pursuant to the rule of law are held in a safe circumstance.

So ICE has recently announced a new set of steps to make sure that detention facilities are safe and sound. Indeed, we will be actually stopping sending some of the apprehendees to some of the centers, including one in Texas, because of some of the circumstances there. And we will continue to work to improve detention overall to make sure the American people have confidence, not only that we are enforcing the law, but we are enforcing it in the right way and that we are doing it in a way that respects

American values.

Now, let me close with one last issue, and that is one I think is also very, very important, and that is the issue of citizenship.

Within the Department of Homeland Security we have Citizenship and Immigration Services. USCIS is part of us. That is the department that does the legal path to citizenship—but how does one do that?

Quite frankly, there's a lot of red tape involved. There have been a lot of backlogs involved, a lot of paperwork involved, and that too needs to be looked at, because quite frankly we can do a less bureaucratic job, and have been doing a less bureaucratic job, for those we wish to or who are applying for visas legally. That's very, very important for us to do to show that it's not just illegal interdiction that we're seeking, but also that there is a path to citizenship for those who are following the law. And I am pleased to announce that those backlogs have been eliminated.

Those pathways are being streamlined; and, by October, we will have available online a way for people to check and see what their status is within the process for becoming naturalized. In other words, they'll be able to check and see how far they are in the process. And if they think things have gotten delayed or held up, they'll be able to take appropriate action. And that, too, is part of how I think we can improve our service to the American people. So let me summarize as follows:

We have a difficult job at the Department of Homeland Security. In fact some say we have the some of the most difficult jobs within the federal government, but we also have some of the greatest opportunities.

We have the job, as I said before, to enforce the law and we need to do that smartly, effectively, strategically, and we need to do that making sure that the Southwest border is not set off by itself, but is part and parcel of our national strategy on illegal immigration, on security, on counter-drugs.

We know that the American people value immigration in many different ways, but they value this concept, that we are a nation of laws, but also a nation of immigrants, and that those two things are not mutually inconsistent. And so as we enforce the laws that we have, we have been asked to look at reforming the laws that exist.

That, of course, will be the responsibility of the congress, and we will look forward to working with the congress on that. But as we do that we wanted to do that in a way so that we match our immigration laws with the needs of the country. We are not going to sit by at the Department of Homeland Security and wait for change in the laws. We're going to enforce the laws that are, but we can reform what we're doing as we wait for reform in the law, and that is exactly what is going on.

We can have an integrated border security strategy that incorporates interior immigration enforcement and a counter drug strategy that deals with demand as well as with supply. These are the things we are doing to take us in a new direction in this new century and that, in my view, is a true border security strategy. It's what we owe cities like El Paso. It's what we owe border communities who find themselves on the front lines of this challenge. And it's what we owe the American people. Thank you very, very much.

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* 8/13/09 - Changed from: "That's a 106 percent increase compared with the same period two years ago, and has conducted almost 215,000 total removals of illegal nationals thus far in 2009—a 125 percent increase over two years ago."

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