Gov. Rick Perry's Remarks Regarding the Results of Operation Rio Grande - Uvalde

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Tuesday, October 17, 2006

Thank you. I am honored to be joined by individuals on the front lines of the fight against border crime, border sheriffs. We are here today to announce the cumulative results of Operation Rio Grande border surge operations which prove beyond a shadow of doubt that when you add manpower, vehicles and technology resources to attack ruthless, transnational criminal enterprises and gangs, all crime goes down dramatically, the border is more secure, and our communities are safer.

With Operation Rio Grande, we set out to prove to Washington, D.C. that the recipe for a secure border involves committing local, state and federal resources in high intensity joint operations aimed at securing common crossing points and providing an enhanced enforcement presence. The results have been astonishing for each individual operation. In Operation Del Rio we experienced a crime reduction ranging from 51 percent to 75 percent among five participating counties. In Operation Laredo, five separate counties experienced a 60 to 75 percent decline in crime. In Operation El Paso, which included four Texas counties and a neighboring county in New Mexico, crime dropped 40 percent to as much as 85 percent. Operation Big Bend, which included some very rugged terrain among five neighboring counties, saw a corresponding reduction of 30 percent to 50 percent. And Operation Valley Star, our most recent surge operation in eight Rio Grande Valley counties, saw a 25 percent to 60 percent reduction in criminal activity. These are stunning results that in some cases perpetuated themselves after operations ended because criminal elements remained leery of crossing certain portions of the Texas border. Borderwide, we experienced an average crime reduction of 60 percent because of intensive operations under Operation Rio Grande.

This is exactly why I have asked the legislature for an additional $100 million: so we can continue our successful anti-crime operations over an extended period of time, with more boots on the ground, more weapons, and enhanced technology tools like live-scan fingerprinting and the TDEX database that connects law enforcement statewide to instantaneous, up-to-date information on individuals they stop and apprehend. This technology is critical to identifying links and relationships between criminal enterprises and terrorist networks.

Related Content
- Tuesday, July 20, 2010 | Houston, Texas | Speech
  Governor Perry Speaks at the Houston Firefighters’ Relief and Retirement Fund Retiree Barbecue
- Wednesday, July 14, 2010 | Austin, Texas | Press Release
  Statement by Texas Gov. Rick Perry on Attorney General’s Amicus Brief in U.S. v. State of Arizona Case
- Thursday, July 01, 2010 | Austin, Texas | Speech
  Gov. Perry Speaks at the National Latino Peace Officers Association’s 37th Annual Training Institute & Convention
- Monday, June 28, 2010 | Austin, Texas | Press Release
  Statement by Gov. Perry Regarding the Obama Administration’s National Guard Deployment Plan for the Southwest Border
- Friday, June 25, 2010 | Austin, Texas | Press Release
  Gov. Perry Announces Nominations for Star of Texas Awards
Why does this strategy work? First of all, unlike traditional performance metrics used by law enforcement at all levels where they justify their budgets based on apprehensions, we base success on the prevention of crime. These numbers show a deterrence in crime because we have increased the law enforcement presence at common crossing points. For too long, the federal government has used arrests, indictments, convictions and seizures of drugs as the measure of their success, which provides a disincentive to stopping smugglers from entering at all. There are 29 common points of entry for criminal operatives into Texas. Thirteen are known as principle illegal crossing points, and the other 16 are secondary routes. Cutting off these paths of entry was critical to our success under Operation Rio Grande.

Second, we recognize the best defense involves added manpower. By providing DPS strike teams, surveillance units, game wardens, Civil Patrol and National Guard personnel and assets, and additional resources for county sheriffs to pay overtime and add officers, we have been able to shut down smuggling operations at the time and place of our choosing rather than passively reacting to the threat posed by international criminal organizations.

Third, we have provided additional fixed-wing and rotary assets to support fully integrated operations from the land, water and air.

Fourth, we have centralized the collection and dissemination of intelligence data through the creation of the Border Security Operations Center. This provides the information needed to coordinate effective operations at all levels along key corridors from Brownsville to El Paso.

Fifth, we have made the border a priority area of focus for new technologies, such as license plate readers and state-of-the-art information sharing to identify criminals and ensure law enforcement has the latest information on individuals that stop and detain. In addition, we continue to use the National Guard in various functions including operations, planning and intelligence.

Let me also comment on something that sometimes gets misunderstood: it is not merely idle chatter to say that border security is critical to homeland security, nor is it incorrect to say these efforts have a direct impact on the ability of terrorists to enter our country. First, intelligence testimony in Washington indicates the border with Mexico is viewed as a prime place of entry by terrorist organizations. Second, last year alone 650 illegal aliens apprehended nationwide came from special interest countries: those countries that are designated by the intelligence community as safe havens for terrorist enemies. This shows that the potential of terrorist organizations to infiltrate our border is a real threat that must be taken seriously. Moreover, evidence suggests that only ten to thirty percent of individuals illegally entering the U.S. are caught. Yes, the great majority of those who enter illegally are from Mexico, and are seeking economic opportunity. But the smaller percentage that comes here with the intent to harm American citizens does not dress in military uniforms, nor do they advertise their arrival. To think that international terrorists have not already exploited our border is naïve at best.

Border security is too important to be left to one level of government. That’s why Texas has joined the fight. And as a leader always more interested in results than process, I am absolutely thrilled that joint operations have caused a 60 percent borderwide decline in crime during intensive operations. Our border sheriffs have taken on a tremendous leadership role, fighting crime in their communities, taking their case to Washington, and making their concerns known to Austin, where I hope they have found a receptive audience.

To further discuss the success of our recent operations is Zapata County Sheriff Sigi Gonzales, who until
recently was the head of the border sheriff's coalition.

Let me also ask Sheriff Jernigan of Val Verde County to share some thoughts.