Gov. Perry Comments on Border Security During El Paso Visit

*Praises partnership with Mexico and calls for increased investment in border security.*

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

Tuesday, February 24, 2009

Thank you, General McCaffrey, for those remarks and thank you for your ongoing engagement in the border security issue. It is an honor to welcome someone with your distinguished record of military service...longtime engagement in the war on drugs, and investment in the next generation of military leaders through your teaching at West Point.

I also want to thank Representative [Dora] Olivo for letting your peers in the Legislature know about the situation here on the ground.

I also want to commend the leadership team here in El Paso for your efforts to keep this city safe in the face of rising violence. Mayor [John] Cook, Chief Allen [EP PD], Judge [Anthony] Cobos, and Sheriff [Richard] Wiles, you have your hands full here and do an admirable job.

I also want to welcome our federal partners who also go in harm’s way to keep Texas safe.

We’re standing here today at a point of convergence between two nations that are dealing with their own crises.

Here in Texas, we are dealing with the growing effects of a global financial crisis that are leading to tighter budgets, increasing job losses, and a growing sense of uncertainty for our citizens.

However, these concerns pale in comparison to the drug-related violence in Mexico that led to more than 5,700 homicides in 2008, and roughly 1,600 violent deaths across the bridge in Juárez.

In just the first two months of 2009, Juárez has...
already seen more than 265 brutal homicides. The U.S. State Department estimates that more than 200 Americans have been killed in Mexico since 2004.

Clearly, the situation in Mexico is dire, and requires our close attention, as the Mexican government wages its own war against a ruthless enemy within.

I am here today to express our sympathy for our neighbors in Mexico, our disgust for the brutal and cowardly tactics of the drug cartels, and our support for President Calderon’s efforts to defeat them.

Mexico is not only our long-time neighbor whose history and culture is interwoven with ours, they’re our number one trade partner. That makes for a bit of a balancing act as we react to the increasing violence and unrest in Mexico…and work to protect our citizens.

Texas has made a significant investment in securing our border, which for too long was a revolving door for northbound drugs and contraband of every sort, along with southbound weapons, cash, fugitives and stolen vehicles.

Many of the guns aimed at Mexican law enforcement passed through our state, as did so many of the dollars funding those violent gangs.

Over the past several years, our investment in boots on the ground and increased patrols in the air and on the water have made a difference. Since operations began, Texas has seen a 52% drop in illegal alien apprehensions, and reduced border crime as much as 65% in key border areas.

The numbers on the other side of the border are staggering and getting worse, and we need to continue our support of their efforts, to combat this scourge plaguing the good people of Mexico.

I also encourage critics to take an objective look at the big picture. I take issue with those who describe Mexico as a “failed state.” Failed states don’t maintain Mexico’s remarkable trade output or keep up the pitched battle with organized crime like they do.

Last year, Mexico was the top destination for Texas exports, with more than $62 billion of our products heading south. At the same time, more than $143 billion in goods crossed the border in our direction.

That’s 43 percent of everything we imported and a 10% bump over the year before. So our relationship is strong and getting stronger.

That is why we need to direct our energies into partnering with Mexico on security issues, not pointing fingers.

I am encouraged by President Calderon’s willingness to commit military resources to counter the cartels’ destructive intentions, increasing firepower, and utter disregard for human life.

Texas is pleased to play the anvil to the hammer of Mexico’s efforts to crush the drug cartels.

That is why I have called on the Legislature to dedicate $135 million to our ongoing border security efforts, and our growing effort to prosecute the transnational gangs that threaten communities across our state.

In short, we cannot compromise on safety and security while ensuring a free-flow of commerce with our number one trading partner and valued neighbor.

We must be ready for any contingency, but I am confident that we are ready to handle the ongoing challenge of securing our border, which will ultimately increase the peace, protect our citizens, and help both Texas and Mexico emerge from these dark times stronger and more viable than ever.
Thank you again for being here. May God bless you all and, through you, may He continue to bless the great state of Texas.