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Federal Efforts To Stem the Flow of Drugs across the U.S.-Mexican Border. May 9, 1978. 5 pp.

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations: International Operations Subcommittee; by William J. Anderson, Deputy Director, General Government Div.

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Control of illegal entry at the United States-Mexico border is basically a task of controlling the movement of people, vehicles, aircraft, boats, and goods. The principal agencies involved in law enforcement at the border are the Customs Service, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Border forces interdict only a small quantity of the estimated heroin and cocaine entering the United States from Mexico; most seizures are of marihuana. In fiscal year 1976, Customs, INS, and DEA intercepted 6% of the heroin, 3% of the cocaine, and 13% of the marihuana estimated to come from Mexico. Border apprehensions seldom involve high-level traffickers. There is a need for an integrated Federal strategy and comprehensive border control plan; this could best be achieved by assignment of border control responsibilities to a single agency. The executive branch should provide the Congress, along with appropriations requests, an overview of law enforcement along the United State-Mexico border, including an analysis of the budget requests and law enforcement strategies of the various border law enforcement agencies. The Office of Management and Budget, Office of Drug Abuse Policy, and principal border agencies should develop an integrated strategy and comprehensive operational plan for border control which would consider alternatives ranging from the present management structure to single-agency management. (RRS)

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STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
ON
FEDERAL EFFORTS TO STEM THE FLOW OF DRUGS
ACROSS THE U.S.-MEXICAN BORDER

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

You have requested that we discuss today a report of the General Accounting Office of December 2, 1977, dealing with illegal entry at the United States-Mexico border.

Control of the border is basically a task of controlling the movement of people, vehicles, aircraft, boats, and goods. There are over 400 Federal laws and regulations governing entry and departure of people and goods across the border. Agencies with a role in controlling the Southwest border include the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF); Department of Defense; Federal Aviation Administration (FAA); Coast Guard; Department of Agriculture; and Public Health Service. The principal

agencies involved in law enforcement are the Customs Service, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

While it is not possible to measure the deterrent effect of the current level of border law enforcement, the available supply of drugs attests to the fact that it has not been a serious impediment to illegal entry. The substantial Federal investment for enforcement at the Southwest border is achieving only a limited measurable impact on the drug problem.

Border forces interdict only a small quantity of the estimated heroin and cocaine entering the United States from Mexico. Most seizures are of marijuana. In fiscal year 1976, Customs and INS seized about 2 percent of the heroin, less than 1 percent of the cocaine, and 10 percent of the marijuana estimated to come from and through Mexico. When DEA's border area seizures are added, these interceptions equal 6 percent of the heroin, 3 percent of the cocaine, and 13 percent of the marijuana. It is fairly obvious that the quantity of drugs being interdicted is not having a significant impact on the drug problem. This is especially true when one considers that these figures presume the drug seizures to be 100-percent pure while the purity of border seizures are generally significantly less--usually below 50 percent purity.

Border apprehensions seldom involve high-level traffickers. The overwhelming majority of persons crossing the border in

possession of drugs who are apprehended by Customs and INS are drug users, small-time operators, couriers, or low-level members of drug trafficking organizations. DEA's data shows that less than 2 percent of the interdictions referred from INS and Customs involve major violators, and about three-fourths of these were marijuana violators.

Over the past few years the Congress, the executive branch, and GAO have issued reports identifying problems among Federal border enforcement agencies and containing suggestions for improving their cooperation and coordination. While some recommendations have been implemented and outward appearances have changed as a result of these efforts, the essential characteristics of the problem remain. Separate agencies with different orientations continue to identify the best means to meet their specific missions, with limited consideration for the activity of the others. This has led to the development of separate but similar lines of effort that continue to dilute border coverage and impact. Little consideration is given to overall border security.

There is obviously a need for an integrated Federal strategy and comprehensive border control plan. Assignment of border control responsibilities to a single agency would be the surest way of achieving this. Pending any decision in this regard, we believe:

--The executive branch should provide the Congress, along with its appropriations requests, an overview of law enforcement along the United States-Mexico border. Included in this overview should be an analysis which brings together the budget requests and law enforcement strategies of the various border law enforcement agencies.

--The Office of Management and Budget, Office of Drug Abuse Policy, and the principal border agencies should develop an integrated strategy and comprehensive operational plan for border control. This plan should consider the various alternatives to managing border operations ranging from the present management structure to single-agency management.

The President's Reorganization Project has circulated a document containing reorganization options related to border management to various individuals and groups for comment and suggestions. Until agreement is reached on the fundamental question of purpose or mission at the border, the selection of reorganization options would appear to be premature.

Ironically, and perhaps predictably, since the current efforts toward reorganization were initiated, the agencies involved in border enforcement have placed an increased

emphasis on voluntary cooperative agreements. Similar abortive efforts in the past do not convince us that any lasting good will result.

Some hard decisions remain to be made regarding how this country can best respond to its Southwest border problems. The options range from the extreme of a politically and economically infeasible "Berlin-wall" arrangement that would almost guarantee no illicit intrusion to the loose controls over entry along the Canadian border. Somewhere in between lies an optimum mix of people and resources that should be applied to the border. Development of an overall Federal strategy is the first step that needs to be taken in coming to grips with this major problem.

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This concludes my prepared statement, Mr. Chairman. We would be pleased to respond to any questions.