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Gov. Perry Announces Comprehensive Border Security Plan for Texas

Says Protecting Border is Federal Responsibility, but State Cannot Wait for Needed Reform

LAREDO –Today Gov. Rick Perry announced a comprehensive, far-reaching security plan for the Texas Mexico-border region.

“This border security plan will increase the law enforcement presence in the border region, provide new investigative tools, improve communications among law enforcement officials, and make our border region more secure,” Perry said. “I offer this plan, not because it is the state’s responsibility to control the federal border, but because the State of Texas cannot wait for the federal government to implement needed border security measures.”

Perry’s Border Security Plan consists of the following six action areas:

- Fully support local law enforcement and Operation Linebacker.
- Reduce violent crime along the border.
- Accelerate radio interoperability.
- Develop a Bi-lateral All-Hazards Response Plan.
- Leverage the expertise and experience of the National Guard to provide training and participate in response exercises.
- Pass legislative reforms, including the expansion of state wiretap authority.

“With more than twelve hundred miles of border shared with Mexico, Texas is clearly at the center of the important debate about how best to secure our border,” Perry said. “In this post 9-11 era, there is no such thing as homeland security without border security.”

Perry noted that Al Qaeda and other terrorists and criminal organizations view the porous Texas-Mexico border as an opportunity to import terror, illegal narcotics and weapons of mass destruction. Gangs like MS-13 have begun operating on both sides of the Texas border and warring factions of the drug trade have had a dramatic effect on life in Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, with confirmed reports of kidnapping, rape and murder on the rise.

“Texas cannot stand idly by when the safety and security of our people is threatened by multi-national criminal syndicates that seek to spread fear and do harm,” Perry said. “This border security plan will improve law enforcement coordination, increase our law enforcement presence, and better prepare us to respond to a catastrophe along the border. It will lead to a safer America because it focuses not only on what happens at our ports of entry, but also between them as well.”

Perry praised recent federal efforts that provide for 1,000 new border patrol agents and greater investments in technology at crossings, but said that congress must do much more. Perry called on the federal government to hire many more border patrol agents; expand the use of technology at, and between, ports of entry; authorize homeland security funding to pay for law enforcement positions and overtime to expand patrols; designate the entire border region in Texas a high-threat area so border communities have the same eligibility for homeland security funds as our large urban areas; and significantly expand federal detention facilities.

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Border Security Plan for Texas

Border security is a multi-dimensional problem that threatens both the safety of Texans and the security of our nation. Although border security is a federal responsibility, Texas has an obligation to protect its citizens. The following is a summary of actions Governor Perry will take to amplify border security:

1. Fully Support Operation Linebacker.

Operation Linebacker was conceived by the Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition as a means to integrate law enforcement resources along the border to increase both public safety and national security between points of entry. Key aspects of the initiative include increased patrols and the support of the local community to enhance border security.

The Governor recognizes that local law enforcement leaders are the "on-the-ground-experts" in the best position to develop and execute meaningful strategies.

Specific the Governor's plan will support Operation Linebacker:

- The Governor has identified \$3 million in Criminal Justice grant funds to hire additional local law enforcement personnel.
- The Governor has identified an additional \$3 million in Criminal Justice grant funds to fund local officer overtime. Increased patrol activity increases public safety.
- Four rapid deployment teams, consisting of 50 state troopers each, will be established to quickly react to hot-spots in direct support of Operation Linebacker.
- Homeland security grant funds will be provided to support the Neighborhood Watch, Reserve Deputy and the Citizen Academy programs along the border.
- Homeland security or criminal justice grant funds will be provided for management and planning personnel to support Operation Linebacker.
- Homeland security or criminal justice grant funds will be provided for equipment to support Operation Linebacker.

2. Reduce Violent Crime Along the Border.

The increased patrol presence and intelligence that result from Operation Linebacker will increase public safety and border security, particularly in rural areas. To ensure a stronger law enforcement presence throughout the border region, additional local law enforcement initiatives that are singularly focused on the reduction of violent border crime are needed.

Citizens who live along the border suffer the daily consequences of border-related violent crime. Powerful criminal organizations support their operations by torturing, kidnapping and murdering citizens on both sides of the border. The Governor recognizes that initiatives developed and executed by local law enforcement leaders are the most effective way to stop the criminal organizations deeply rooted in local areas along the border. To reduce violent crime, the Governor will directly fund and support the multi-agency investigative initiatives of local law enforcement agencies.

- The Governor has \$3.7 million in Criminal Justice Grant funds to support local, multi-agency law enforcement initiatives.
- DPS will permanently assign 54 criminal investigators to the border in support of local law enforcement agencies.
- Prioritization will be given to the border for implementation of TDEX, a statewide technology project that bridges gaps in criminal information sharing. TDEX will enable law enforcement personnel to search for information on specific subjects and violations across all law enforcement agency databases in Texas. This unprecedented capability will foster cross-case analysis and help law enforcement dismantle organized criminal groups.

3. Achieve Radio Interoperability.

Expedite plans to achieve radio interoperability for border first responders.

Texas has a statewide plan to achieve radio interoperability by 2007. This plan will be fast-tracked along the border. Radio interoperability will improve multi-agency capabilities to rapidly act upon information related to violent crimes and to quickly respond to all hazards. Recognizing the border threat, the Governor's Office has already allocated an additional \$5 million to South Texas to more rapidly connect law enforcement agencies and other first responders. The State will closely monitor and expedite this initiative. The Governor will provide an additional \$1.2 million to Laredo to complete the purchase and deployment of an interoperable system that will serve as the communications backbone for the entire region.

[Funding Note: Currently, \$1.2 million has been provided to the City of Laredo for this initiative. The State Administrative Agency for homeland security grant funds (SAA) will meet with local officials at the end of October to announce the process for dispensing remaining funds. The SAA provides regular status updates to local jurisdictions.]

4. Develop Bi-lateral All-Hazards Response Plans.

Develop and exercise bilateral regional response plans for disasters that occur along the Texas-Mexico border.

Texas will seek partnerships with Mexican communities to minimize loss of life and damage to property if a catastrophic event occurs in the border region. Just as terrorism and crime affect both sides of the border, disasters and other emergencies do not respect national boundaries. Response and recovery are critical homeland security functions and will be tailored to the bi-national needs of the border. Bilateral emergency response plans and exercises will foster information channels between first responders in Texas and Mexico. These communication channels will also enhance other aspects of homeland security.

5. Leverage the Expertise and Experience of the National Guard to Provide Training and Participate in Response Exercises.

Enlist the National Guard to provide homeland security support, training and exercises without militarizing the border. The National Guard will serve in a support capacity to enhance Homeland Security activities along the border. The Guard will also provide training and participate in exercises to test response capabilities.

6. Border Security for the Legislature to Consider.

Legislators should consider legislation to address border security, including providing investigative tools for dismantling criminal organizations that support terrorism and engage in violent crime.

An example of critical border security legislation would be a bill that expands wire tap authority for the state for all 3g offenses – such as aggravated robbery, aggravated kidnapping, aggravated sexual assault, and other similar crimes – so that investigators can better identify, infiltrate and dismantle the heavily entrenched criminal organizations along the border. Current Texas statute limits the use of wire taps in Texas to DPS investigations of drug-related crimes, capital murder and murder. The criminal organizations wreaking havoc along the border are involved in myriad crimes in addition to murder and drug-related crimes, including kidnapping, sexual assault and extortion, and could be providing direct or indirect support to terrorists. Wire tap authority is an essential tool to take down these violent criminal groups that threaten public safety along the border.

Overview: The Border Threat

Al-Qaeda leadership plans to use criminal alien smuggling organizations to bring terrorist operatives across the border into the U.S. A vulnerable border also gives terrorists opportunities to smuggle weapons of mass destruction into the U.S. undetected. There can be no homeland security in Texas without border security.

Illegal aliens from countries other than Mexico—known as OTMs—are flowing across the Texas-Mexico border at alarming rates. According to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, more than 119,000 OTMs were apprehended in 2005 from January through July. An unknown number were never detected or apprehended. The McAllen Border Patrol Sector alone, which includes Brownsville, Harlingen and McAllen and 316 border miles, reports that it has apprehended more than 47,600 OTMs thus far in 2005.

OTMs of particular concern are from countries with a known al-Qaeda presence such as Iraq, Iran, Indonesia and Bangladesh, and the Triborder region of Latin America which lies between Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. The Triborder Region is a focal point of Islamic extremism.

Border security is aggravated by the lack of federal detention space. Rather than being detained until an immigration court hearing, some OTMs are released on their own recognizance with orders to appear at a deportation hearing. In the McAllen Border Patrol Sector, more than 42,000 OTMs have been released in 2005 and the majority fail to appear in court. No show rates are almost 90% in Harlingen. The newly expanded federal Expedited Return policy to repatriate OTMs who have spent less than 14 days in the United States and are apprehended within 100 miles of the border is a step toward addressing this security gap. However, many OTMs apprehended further inland and more than two weeks after their entry continue to pose a significant threat to Texas.

In addition to posing a threat to national security, the unsecured border threatens public safety. Local law enforcement has long been overwhelmed along the border. Events in Nuevo Laredo illustrate how powerful Mexican drug trafficking organizations torture, kidnap and murder on both sides of the border to support their operations. The Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang is now operating in Texas and is engaged in violent crime on both sides of the border. MS-13 is a violent street gang founded by Salvadorans in Los Angeles in the 1980's. MS-13 has expanded to an estimated 10,000 members in 33 states in the U.S. and a further 50,000 members in Latin America.

The citizens who live along the border suffer the daily consequences of drug-related violence, robbery, burglary and theft. These armed criminal organizations also prey upon aliens who cross the border in search of employment.

Policy Framework

- Two-thirds (1,240 miles) of the U.S.-Mexico border lies in Texas. Until the border is secured, international terrorists, organized crime and violent gangs, such as MS-13, will continue to place Texans at risk.
- Our neighbors to the south face the same threats. Recent events in Nuevo Laredo illustrate that residents on both sides of the border are at a great risk of violent crimes.
- Legitimate commerce and travel between Mexico and the United States is vital to the Texas and U.S. economies. Travel and trade must not be slowed by threats from terrorist and criminal organizations.
- New technologies at ports of entry increase the speed of commerce and travel and strengthen our security. Texas fully supports federal efforts to expand the use of technology at the border.
- Lawmakers and the public have called for several federal initiatives to increase border security, to include:
 - Hire 10,000 more border and custom patrol agents
 - Substantially expand immigration detention facilities, in order to eliminate the “catch and release” policy that increases security threats in Texas communities
 - Expand the use of technology at and between the ports of entry, including US-VISIT and use of the Predator
 - Establish a volunteer program within U.S. Customs and Border Patrol
- Texas supports all of the above federal initiatives, but they will take time to implement. We must move quickly to reduce the threat from international terrorists, organized crime and gangs who exploit the border. Texas also recommends the following immediate federal actions:
 - Designate the border a high-threat area, making local agencies along the border eligible for additional homeland security funds.
 - Authorize the use of homeland security funding to pay for law enforcement positions and overtime to expand patrols in the border region.

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