

Testimony of Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon

***Senate Subcommittee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs***

Chairman Lieberman, Senator McCain, welcome. We're always pleased to have each of you in Phoenix.

Last month, I was invited to Washington, D.C., to offer testimony before a House Subcommittee on this very topic. I went then, and I come here now to discuss an issue which must so urgently be discussed, debated, addressed and, to the best of our ability – resolved.

There can be no doubt that a crisis exists at our border with Mexico. And for reasons ranging from an historically bad economy on the Mexican side of the border – to various degrees of inattention on our own side of the border – to the border itself which is vast and porous – Phoenix finds itself at the center of this Perfect Storm – a storm that is growing increasingly violent, threatening and resource-consuming. Homeland Security includes Home *Town* Security. And that's especially true for border communities like mine.

Senators, I know a number of your colleagues, sitting 2,000 miles from Arizona, envision a border like you'll find at El Paso and Juarez. A road in, a road out, with railroad crossing-type arms to control the flow of cars and people. But the Arizona/Mexico border is not like

that. It is 200 miles long – and hundreds of square miles in area. It is hot, rugged, and has nooks and crannies, ravines and ridges that facilitate covert movement. The border is, in many ways, imaginary. Likewise there is no “Great Wall of Phoenix” to separate us from that imaginary border. And I promise you, what happens at the border, does not stay at the border. It comes here. Which is why we’re so deeply involved.

But what happens in Phoenix, doesn’t stay here, either. The criminals don’t drop anchor here. We’re just a gateway. They continue on to Washington and Oregon. Iowa and Kansas. Maine and Connecticut.

That’s one of the reasons I welcome you to Phoenix. So you’ll see first hand that it is not simply a Phoenix problem. It’s a national problem requiring a national solution. We do need more funding. Funding to continue our partnerships with ICE, with the DEA, with the FBI, with ATF. We do need continued funding to go after the Worst of the Worst. We do need continued funding to cut the drugs and the violence off at the border. We do need continued funding to help and protect our own law enforcement personnel. You’ve seen the pictures from Mexico. You’ve seen what their criminal syndicates do to good Mexican police officers and honest Mexican politicians. They don’t respect our border, and they won’t respect our police. We need your continued help.

We really do have a dichotomy here in Phoenix. Our crime is actually down, in every category, over the last year. And last year's crime numbers were down from the year before THAT. The same is true for Mesa, and except for the unincorporated areas of this County, the same is true for most of Maricopa County. Our cities have their priorities straight. We know the first order, is to maintain order, and safety. That's why we plead with you, and your colleagues in the Senate and the House, to continue funding the federal agencies that we have so successfully been partnering with.

We need new funding for the US Marshals and others, who can go after dangerous felons by serving them the warrants that already have their names on them, instead of letting them collect dust on some closet shelf.

We have been widely referred to in Phoenix, as "The Kidnapping Capital of the World". And that may very well be true. But one of the reasons why, is that Phoenix's policy, unlike the policies of many cities, is to report every crime. And Senators, the Uniform Crime Statistics aren't all that uniform, when the reporting methods are anything BUT uniform.

I would point out that the extreme violence we are seeing on the Mexico side of our border – including beheadings – has not yet spilled over to the American side. And even the kidnappings and shootings that have spilled over, almost exclusively involve what enforcement refers to as "Bad guys on bad guys".

But in the absence of “Eternal Vigilance” from all of us – that spillover violence will most certainly increase – and the victim pool will expand to include law-abiding, American residents who are just living their lives.

And even though the violence largely remains south of our border, the perception is very different. And that, if left unchecked, will start impacting the people who want to visit Phoenix. The ones who want to move to Phoenix. The businesses that want to relocate to Phoenix. And anyone who wants to invest in Phoenix. And that, of course, impacts our economy, which impacts our revenue stream, which impacts our ability to expand the public safety efforts that are necessary to stem this tide.

It's a circle that must be broken.

The City of Phoenix has just reduced our 2010 budget by \$280 million. That's not a terribly large number by Washington standards, but for a city like Phoenix, it's about a third of our total budget. Those are serious reductions. I'd like to tell you Public Safety was spared from these reductions, but that is not the case.

As you might suspect, the cost to Phoenix of border-related crime is staggering – and far beyond what most municipalities in this country are required to bear. It's the cost of intelligence. The cost of equipment. The cost of hiring new officers. The cost of overtime.

The cost of undercover operations that continue for months and, sometimes, years. The ongoing surveillance operations.

In these challenging economic times, we must be particularly sensitive to the manner in which we allocate our increasingly-scarce resources. That's why Phoenix goes after the "Worst of the Worst". We arrest dangerous, violent felons: drug smugglers, human smugglers, kidnappers, murderers, gang members and members of criminal syndicates.

Fighting these dangerous, well-armed criminals – often armed at a level that meets or exceeds our own law enforcement and National Guard personnel – is challenging. Sophisticated criminal operations require an expensive and sophisticated response.

And, a quick response. People are being tortured. People are being kidnapped. Almost every night, Phoenix Police will get one or more calls with variations of the same story – "My wife is being held in a Phoenix drop house and they say they will torture and kill her if we don't pay them thousands of dollars". The response to that kind of call is incredibly "labor intensive". For each one of those calls, Phoenix will divert significant resources on the spot – as many as 60 officers -- to find, rescue and protect these kidnap victims. Again, these intensive operations happen routinely. The overtime hours are staggering; the personnel resources diverted from preventing or solving other crimes are massive.

We have the finest police department in the nation. With 540 square miles to cover – which equates to about one officer, per square mile, per shift -- they arrest 40,000 felony-criminals a year – and handle one million calls for service. My own son serves proudly – and his dad is very proud of that. But the 3,000 dedicated men and women of the Phoenix Police Department – as good as they are – are being stretched very thin. That's why we have been leaders in forming creative partnerships – and pioneering creative programs to fight these international criminals. And we've had some tremendous successes and significant results.

I do want to take a moment to thank the federal government, and each of you, for the partnerships we have had so many successes with.

Let me give you just a few short examples of the many Joint Operations that have yielded profound results in just the past year:

Operation Blank Check, a partnership with our local federal agencies, led to the felony indictments of 183 individuals. This year-long investigation led directly to the arrests of hardcore gang members from 22 different gangs who trafficked in drugs and fraudulent checking schemes – totaling more than 3 million dollars -- to fund their operations.

Operation En Fuego, also in partnership with our local federal agencies, was responsible for the break-up of a major Phoenix-based

smuggling organization and the indictment of 35 individuals on felony charges related to the human smuggling of more than 10,000 individuals.

Operation Tumbleweed, again involving our local federal agencies, disrupted and stopped the illegal activities of 20 different organizations by following a common money trail right back to them all. Drug smuggling. Human smuggling. Money laundering. All disrupted and stopped.

Additionally, we shut down two of the largest syndicates in the nation that dealt in the tragedy of human smuggling. Each year, 15,000 people were brought into the United States, through Phoenix, illegally. And 30 million dollars went the other way. They're out of business now.

Phoenix PD is a critical participant in IIMPACT Arizona – which stands for Illegal Immigration Prevention and Apprehension Co-op Teams. It's a program that is managed by Arizona DPS – includes ICE -- and is designed to deter, disrupt and dismantle violent criminal organizations profiting from illegal immigration

And we're a member of The FBI Violent Street Gang Task Force – which has resulted in more than 300 felony arrests in the past year alone.

Partnering with DEA, the Border Patrol, FBI, ATF, the US Attorney, the US Postal Inspectors, and State and local agencies – we have

disrupted serious criminal activity. We have executed thousands of warrants, won thousands of felony indictments and arrested thousands of dangerous and violent people engaging in Drug Trafficking, gun smuggling, drug smuggling, human smuggling and kidnapping. We have kept millions of dollars from flowing from the United States to Mexico.

The Phoenix Police Department has pioneered a program that has been very effective for us. We have actually embedded ICE agents, on a full-time basis, inside our Police Department. That's where their desks are. And their presence and participation in key areas of enforcement has been invaluable. They provide intelligence. They have access to federal databases. They partner with us – on the street -- to go after violent criminals and reduce violent crime (which was DOWN by 6 percent last year in Phoenix) – and they are an important piece of what we do.

In addition to ICE, Phoenix has its own police officers embedded in FBI. We have embedded City Prosecutors with the US Attorney's Office, allowing us to bring and prosecute federal charges in many important cases – particularly cases involving guns.

Phoenix and its federal partners have established a task force to aggressively pursue kidnapers and those who invade homes. We share expertise and intelligence – and we share in excellent results.

So for us, and for this country, partnerships are everything. And nobody does them better – or values them more, than Phoenix, the Phoenix Police Department, Federal agents and our State's Department of Public Safety.

Again, I am so grateful to our federal partners.

When this nation was founded, no one ever conceived or imagined that immigration enforcement was an issue that would ever fall to mayors and local police departments. But here we are. Not only are we being forced to step up our immigration efforts, but we also have an increased burden when it comes to gun crimes and white-collar crimes – connected to illegal immigration and formerly handled at the federal level.

But the good news is – we CAN fix the problem.

When, as a nation, we roll up our sleeves, focus on a goal, debate our options, outline a course and act with conviction and principle – there is nothing we cannot accomplish. America is a great nation -- and Americans always live up to that greatness. We have won freedom for much of the world. We have industrialized the world. We have fed the world. In so many ways, we have changed the world. And we have shown the ability to change our own nation when change was needed.

And on all these issues relating to immigration, this nation of immigrants will do it again.