

**OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CHARLES E. GRASSLEY**  
**SENATE CAUCUS ON INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL**  
***“Illegal Tunnels on the Southwest Border”***  
**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15, 2011**

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Madam Chairman, thank you for holding today’s hearing. Before I get into the specifics on the issue of Border Tunnels, I wanted to say a quick word about the report released on Monday by the Chairwoman and members of the Caucus on her side of the aisle.

When we released the Caucus report on Responses to Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations last month, Chairman Feinstein and I noted in our cover letter we had differing views on the causes and sources of firearms in Mexico.

While we may disagree on this point, I think it is a testament to the collegial spirit of the Caucus that we can accommodate different points of view on such a hot button issue by preparing separate reports.

We do intend to file a minority Caucus report on the topic in the future. However, we will likely release that report some time down the road given the important information we are uncovering as part of the ongoing investigation into the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives Operation “Fast and Furious.”

Earlier today I testified before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee about the joint investigation Chairman Issa and I are conducting of ATF’s Operation “Fast and Furious”. Our investigation has uncovered serious problems at the Department of Justice and the ATF. Whistleblowers from within the ATF have come forward to both of our offices to express their outrage with this operation because they were instructed by supervisors to “let guns walk”.

According to these courageous whistleblowers, this phrase means that ATF knowingly allowed criminal straw buyers to purchase hundreds of high powered rifles, handguns, and semi-automatic firearms. These straw buyers bought hundreds of firearms that were never recovered by ATF and were later provided to criminals and drug cartels.

We now know that those firearms were found on both sides of our border at countless crime scenes—including at the murder scene of Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry. I have met with Agent Terry’s family and this preventable tragedy is unfortunately one of many tragedies in the U.S and Mexico caused by ATF’s decision to let guns walk. Further, with so many “Fast and Furious” guns “on the loose” we do not know how many more crimes will be committed on both sides of the border with these guns.

Among other things, our minority report will include findings related to the Fast and Furious investigation and how ATF allowed the export of firearms to Mexico. It will also deal with other sources of firearms in Mexico including high powered military rifles from Central American militaries stolen by drug cartels.

That said, today's hearing is a continuation of our efforts to discuss vulnerabilities across the Southwest Border. We have heard in our previous hearings about methods used by drug cartels operating in Mexico and Central America to move drugs and other contraband into the United States. Although the border tunnels don't extend all the way from the Southwest Border to Iowa, the devastating effects of the contraband moved through those tunnels do.

Illegal narcotics including meth, cocaine, and heroin are transported north through Mexico and end up on the streets of my home state and the rest of our country. So these tunnels aren't just a problem for the Border States, like Senator Feinstein's state of California or Senator Cornyn's state of Texas, but they affect all of us.

During hearings held by both the Drug Caucus and the Judiciary Committee, I have heard from experts that drug cartels and other criminal organizations make billions of dollars by moving illegal narcotics and other contraband. These criminal organizations are adept at shifting their operations and trafficking routes to the paths of least resistance. Since 9/11 when the United States began increasing enforcement along our borders, tunnel construction has increased as smugglers were forced to come up with alternative ways to move contraband.

The increased use of tunnels, sometimes dug hundreds of feet underground, is an example of this shift. As pressure on ground routes has increased, the traffickers have moved below ground to move their products.

Smugglers have been digging for years under the Southwest border to avoid detection as they move contraband into the United States. Mexican drug cartels build these tunnels to connect locations in Mexico to points in the United States along the border, such as San Diego, California, and Nogales [NO-GALL-ESS], Arizona.

These tunnels range in sophistication from simple passageways to elaborate transportation systems. Some tunnels have even been equipped with elevators, electrical and ventilation systems, and rail lines. The elevators and rail systems facilitate the movement of large amounts of contraband, and ventilation systems enable workers to spend hours underground.

A problem this large and complex requires a coordinated effort on the part of our administrative agencies. Tunnel investigations and detection operations are conducted by the multi-agency San Diego Tunnel Task Force. The task force includes personnel from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, and the Drug Enforcement Administration. The Task Force was formed seven years ago and uses a variety of techniques to detect border tunnels, from state-of-the-art electronic surveillance to old fashioned detective work.

The Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Northern Command, the Army Corps of Engineers, and other agencies formed the rapid reaction tunnel detection joint capability technology demonstration in 2010. Its first task was to deploy a series of passive seismic sensors, which can detect movement underground at hotspots along the border. I'm interested to hear more about this and other technology from our witnesses.

Additionally, the Drug Caucus report regarding U.S. and Mexican Responses to Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations included a recommendation regarding border tunnels. Specifically, the report calls for Congress to pass legislation to enhance the 2007 law that criminalizes the financing, construction, and use of border tunnels. This legislation would also make it illegal to use, construct, or finance a border tunnel. It would also make illegal tunneling an eligible offense for Title III wire interception.

I look forward to hearing the testimony from the witnesses and about ways we can strengthen our efforts to attack this problem.