



Hon. Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement and Questions as Prepared for Delivery
Oversight of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration
DEA Administrator Michelle Leonhart
House Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
June 20, 2012

Good morning, Administrator.

It is good to see you again. You and I met in February to discuss the DEA's response to drug trafficking and associated violence in Puerto Rico. I really appreciate that you came to see me despite your busy schedule.

I know I don't need to tell you that we are experiencing a public safety crisis in Puerto Rico. You, as much as any federal official, have an intimate understanding of just how serious this problem is. The number of drug-related homicides in Puerto Rico in recent years would be considered a national emergency if it were occurring in any state. That's not just my opinion; that's what Senator Rubio said during a hearing in December.

Since our meeting, there have been several important developments. First, the House approved a C-J-S Appropriations bill that notes that federal efforts along the Southwest border have affected trafficking routes and crime rates in the Caribbean, and that directs the Attorney General to address these trends by allocating the necessary resources to U.S. jurisdictions in the Caribbean and reporting back to Congress on the specific steps that have been taken.

Second, about two weeks ago, Attorney General Holder was sitting where you are now. I asked him why it would not be appropriate for DOJ to increase the resources it devotes to Puerto Rico, even if it is only a temporary surge, just as the federal government did when there was a spike in violence on the U.S. side of the Southwest border. I acknowledged current budget constraints, but said this was a matter of prioritizing limited resources and making sure they are being allocated to the U.S. jurisdictions where the need is greatest.

The AG responded that DOJ was starting to embrace this “surge” concept, injecting agents and resources into what he called “hot spots”—that is, areas that had seen increases in violent crime despite the fact that national crime rates have been consistently going down. The AG said that Puerto Rico would certainly be a candidate for such a surge given the Island’s violent crime rate. Those are heartening words, and I hope they are followed by action.

Third, the Homeland Security Committee is holding a hearing tomorrow on drug trafficking and related violence in the U.S. territories in the Caribbean, at which senior officials from ICE, CBP and the Coast Guard will testify about what they are doing to address the current crisis.

Finally, as we speak, the House Appropriations Committee is approving a bill that will direct ONDCP to develop a Caribbean Border Counternarcotics Strategy, on terms equivalent to the existing Southwest and Northern border counternarcotics strategies. I have been working to achieve this result for many months and I am gratified that this document will finally be prepared and published.

This leads me to my questions.

- First, your men and women in Puerto Rico are doing terrific work. Several weeks ago, for example, your agency led an operation that resulted in the arrests of dozens of airline workers in Puerto Rico who were smuggling drugs on flights to the mainland U.S. However, despite the recent staffing increases that you briefed me on when we met, I remain absolutely convinced that the DEA does not have enough agents in Puerto Rico. According to data provided to my office, there are nearly three times as many agents assigned to the Miami Field Office as there are to Puerto Rico, even though the Island's population is 7.5 times greater than metropolitan Miami's—and our drug-related violence problem is off the charts. I want to be clear: I am not saying that Miami does not face significant problems; I am just

providing a comparison that, in my view, brings into sharp relief just how under-resourced Puerto Rico is. I would like to hear your view.

- Second, I would like to get your opinion on the Attorney General's statement that DOJ has surged agents and resources to several areas in the mainland U.S. and that Puerto Rico would be a candidate for a similar surge. As the head of DEA, an agency on the front lines of this fight, don't you think this idea makes sense?

- Third, I know that recruiting agents to accept assignment to Puerto Rico, and retaining them in those positions once they get there, has been a challenge for many years. I understand that, in 2009, DEA established a relocation incentive, equal to 25 percent of basic pay, to encourage agents and other personnel to relocate to Puerto Rico, and that the agency's vacancy rate has decreased from 18 percent to about 8 percent over the last four years. What more can be done to improve the recruitment and retention situation in Puerto Rico?

Thank you.