

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein

“Drug Trafficking Across the Southwest Border and Oversight of U.S. Counterdrug Assistance to Mexico”

November 17, 2015

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the hearing, and thank you for being so supportive of this.

As I listened to your comments and reviewed my comments and welcome the gentlemen before us today, I look at \$2.5 billion having been spent over the last seven years, and the pillars of the Mérida Initiative not having been reached. Whether one concludes this is a failure, I can't say with specificity.

But I can say, as a Californian, where we have the majority of what's coming over the border, coming into the United States today, as deeply unsatisfactory.

And so I hope, as a product of this hearing, you gentlemen will have some specifics as to what we must do to change that.

Clearly, organized crime hasn't been disrupted.

Clearly, the institutionalizing of the rule of law may be beginning, and we'll point that out, but it's not there yet.

If this is a 21st century border, I think we've got a long way still to go.

As far as building strong and resilient communities, I see this as a failure.

We may have increased cooperation with Mexico, but the amount of money spent and the corruption and weak rule of law, still in Mexico, continue, I think, to threaten any progress between us and Mexico.

The State Department's 2015 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report identifies corruption as a challenge at all levels of Mexican government.

And unfortunately, there are real examples that underscore that.

The 20 prison officers charged with aiding Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán's escape from a maximum security prison. And I think we all watched it on television and are amazed at what happened. That prison had been deemed secure, and the people there had been trained by the United States.

In another case, the mayor, military, and local police were implicated in the forced disappearance of 43 students in Guerrero last year.

And, while the Federal District, and 25 of 31 states in Mexico have begun to transition to a public trial system to prevent corruption, one state has yet to start implementing the new system. And only six have fully implemented the necessary reforms, despite a June 2016 deadline.

So clearly we have big problems, and we need new solutions.

Secondly, despite Mérida investments, transnational criminal organizations continue to thrive.

The DEA notes in its 2015 National Drug Threat Assessment that Mexican transnational criminal organizations, quote, “pose the greatest criminal drug threat to the United States; no other group is currently positioned to challenge them.”

And the way it appears to my staff, and thereby to me, is it doesn't matter if these people are in jail. The organization continues. And the numbers of transnational transportation of narcotics continues to increase.

Although 92 of 122 designated high value targets had been killed or captured as of September 2015, very few have been convicted in Mexico. In addition, only 21 Mexican nationals have been extradited to the United States for drug offenses this year.

So these targets must be brought to justice, but they have not. So I think we need to look at the whole strategy and see if its working and where it isn't we need to make replacements. Or if it isn't working at all, we need to try something else.

If you look at these maps, the majority of heroin and meth enters the United States through my home state, California. And the Mexican border, all throughout my public life, has caused enormous concern.

In a five year span, there was a 156 percent increase in heroin seizures and a 300 percent increase in meth seizures at the Southwest Border.

In 2014, Mexican poppy cultivation increased 59 percent to 17,000 hectares, while pure heroin production potential increased by an alarming 61 percent.

This occurred even as Mr. Guzman, the head of the Sinaloa Cartel, the most active illicit drug supplier to the United States, was imprisoned. So the appearance is that it doesn't really make any difference whether these guys are imprisoned or not. The drug trade continues its inexorable march. And I'm just not going to put up with it. This is going to be an interesting hearing.

Increases in production and trafficking are driven by U.S. demand, which has dire consequences, and has led to a horrific heroin epidemic. And we by and large do very little about it.

Between 2010 and 2013, there has been staggering 172 percent increase in heroin-related deaths in this country.

Meth consumption in the United States is ticking upwards, especially in the west. In 2013, past year meth use in California was double the national average. So we have a big problem. I know it, and I desperately want to do something about it.

Meth-related emergency room visits and deaths are on the rise. In San Diego alone, meth was detected in 950 deaths between 2009 and 2014.

So I really look forward to hearing from each of our witnesses on how to better reduce demand in our own country. What do we need to do? What kind of effort do we need to make? How do we improve security cooperation with Mexico? And most importantly, how do we, in a bold faced way, look this failure in the eyes and see what we're going to do about it. So I really look forward to some no nonsense testimony today, and I thank our witnesses for coming.