

Testimony of Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon
Before the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science
March 24, 2009

Chairman Mollohon, Ranking Member Wolf, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Phil Gordon and I am the Mayor of Phoenix, Arizona – the fifth largest city in the country.

I am proud to be joined by our Public Safety Manager – Jack Harris – who has been with the Phoenix Police Department for 36 years. Chief Harris is the only major city Police Chief to have risen through the ranks and spend the entirety of his career with the same Department -- and he will be available to answer any technical or professional questions should the Subcommittee so desire.

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. I am a very concerned Mayor. And I am here today to talk about the partnerships Phoenix has established with federal enforcement agencies – and to encourage the funding to them that will allow these effective and essential partnerships to continue.

I'll tell you something about my own City that just about any Mayor will tell you about their City: We have the finest police department in the nation. 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. In Phoenix, our Officers do what police officers do in every community. (crime, across the board, was down in Phoenix last year – including a 24 percent reduction in homicides over the previous year). But due to the happenstance of geography and circumstance, our officers have the additional burdens – and risks -- associated with border crimes.

They do an amazing job. But it's a job they cannot do alone – and shouldn't be expected to do alone. 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.

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 – and we have kept our focus on what Public Safety Manager Harris calls “The Worst of the Worst”.

That is how we can be most effective at keeping our community safe. By allocating our scarce resources where they have the greatest impact. And by partnering with others, to effectively increase the resources available to us.

Again, the federal government has been a tremendous partner. We have accomplished important things together to help keep my community – and our nation -- safe.

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 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. Again, I am so grateful to our federal partners.

Let me give you just a few short examples of Joint Operations that have yielded profound results.

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 or stopped.

Additionally, we shut down two of the largest syndicates we know of that deal 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 participates 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.

So for us, and for this country, partnerships are everything. And nobody does them better – or values them more, than Phoenix.

Obviously, we need federal help to secure our borders. But we need your continuing help battling the violent crime that results from a border not yet secure. In spite of – and for that matter, because of -- our current economic struggles – I am here to ask for – to plea for – your continued support of our partnerships.

That means political support – but it also means financial support. Because of the current economic crisis we've had to cut back on our city budgets -- as has everyone has.

The City of Phoenix has just reduced our 2010 budget by \$280 million. That'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.

Last year, I talked about the cost of law enforcement for a border state to a national gathering of The Police Foundation. As you might suspect, the cost 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. The cost of surveillance planes.

Fighting these dangerous, well-armed criminals is not like rounding up day laborers or chasing nickel bags. They are expensive and sophisticated operations that 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.

So again, I come to Washington today, to thank you for your partnership – and to ask your continued help in fighting the good fight – against bad guys.

As Mayor, I respectfully urge this Subcommittee to support not just continuing – but increasing -- funding to our federal partners in Arizona – so we can continue the partnerships we have used smartly and effectively – and so we can continue doing our part – and then some – to protect Americans. If you have even one dollar to invest – this is where it will have an immediate impact. Homeland Security includes Home *Town* Security. And that's especially true for border communities like mine.

Thank you all for allowing me to appear before you today. I am here, as is Chief Harris, to answer any questions you might have.