

Senator Jeff Sessions
Questions for the Record
Michele Leonhart

1. As you are well aware, drug-related violence in Mexico is continuing to escalate. In March 2009, you testified you “could not label [the DEA’s strategy in Mexico] a failure.”¹ Do you still hold that view, in light of the ever-increasing violence south of the border and its spill-over into adjacent areas of this country?

While it may seem counterintuitive, the extraordinary level of violence in Mexico is a signpost of successful law-and-order campaigns by military and law enforcement officials in Mexico. Most of the violence in Mexico can be organized into three broad categories: intra-cartel violence that occurs among and between members of the same criminal syndicate, inter-cartel violence that occurs between rival groups, and cartel-versus-government violence. It is important to note that intra- and inter-cartel violence have always been associated with the Mexican drug trade. It is my belief that with continued DEA support and cooperation, our brave counterparts in Mexico can be successful in their fight against these dangerous criminal organizations.

2. What do you think the United States can do to better assist Mexico in its efforts to end drug cartels and the accompanying violence?

I recognize that interagency and international collaboration and coordination is fundamental to our success. It is imperative that we sustain the positive momentum by supporting the Mexican government’s heroic efforts against the drug cartels. We must manage expectations, as we anticipate that the gruesome violence in Mexico may get worse before it gets better. We must recognize that we are witnessing acts of true desperation: the actions of wounded, vulnerable, and dangerous criminal organizations. DEA and other law enforcement agencies must strive to increase cooperation and must remain committed to working to stem the flow of bulk cash and weapons south, while also working to sustain the disruption of drug transportation routes northward. If confirmed, I will continue to improve DEA’s already outstanding relationships with our state/local/international counterparts as we continue to indict, arrest, and extradite Mexico’s “most wanted” drug traffickers.

- a. Do you agree that strengthening our border security would help to alleviate that problem?

The Southwest Border (SWB) of the United States is the principal arrival zone for most of the illicit drugs smuggled into the United States, as well as, the predominant staging area for the drugs’ subsequent distribution throughout the country. The Department of Justice Southwest Border Strategy, led by the

¹ Testimony before the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies, March 26, 2009.

Deputy Attorney General, uses federal prosecutor-led task forces that bring together all law enforcement components to identify, disrupt and dismantle the Mexican drug cartels through investigation, prosecution and extradition of their key leaders and facilitators, and seizure and forfeiture of their assets. As part of this strategy, DEA is already working closely on the SWB with ATF, FBI, ICE, CBP and other federal, state, local, and foreign counterparts to secure the border and prevent drug, money and weapons smuggling. Any actions which would result in strengthening our border security would assist DEA and other law enforcement agencies as we tackle the problem of crime along the SWB.

- b. Will you work to strengthen border security efforts to control the flow of drugs in this country?

If confirmed, DEA's ongoing efforts along the SWB will continue to be a priority, and we will work with our federal/state/local partners to increase border security. Approximately 30% of domestic DEA Special Agent personnel are assigned to SWB Field Divisions. DEA will also continue to work with our law enforcement partners in the United States and overseas to target, dismantle, and prosecute Mexican drug trafficking organizations wherever they are operating. Additionally, the enhancement of law enforcement information collection and dissemination is a priority, to which the El Paso Intelligence Center will grow and continue its essential support and assistance to all law enforcement in the U.S. and Mexico.

- 3. If a state elects to legalize a banned substance under the Controlled Substances Act, will you commit to working within the Administration to enforce federal law notwithstanding the state's action?

I support the Administration's commitment to enforce the CSA in all states. The CSA provides for classifying substances based on careful study and a sound scientific foundation. As the Acting Administrator, I remain concerned with any state actions that attempt to legalize controlled substances and believe that state legalization efforts lead to increased substance abuse.