

A Regional Solution to a National Problem

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Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition (TBSC) In Partnership

ORIGIN

The Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition was organized on May 4, 2005, when sixteen visionary Sheriffs came together to combine knowledge and voices to bring attention to a national problem – stating the problem was not enough for these leaders, so they offered a solution.

TBSC is represented by the Chief Law Enforcement Officer of each respective county. Texas Sheriffs (empowered by the state constitution) are committed, from a national security perspective, to protect lives, property, and the rights of the people, maintain order and security in the United States along the Republic of Mexico border, enforce the law impartially, and provide police service in partnership with other law enforcement agencies and community partners. This is the Mission!

The area covered by the now 20 counties of TBSC is 46,825 square miles which is 17.9% of Texas and is larger than 17 states of the United States. The population is 9.96% of Texas. Membership is limited to counties within 25 miles of the Texas/ Mexico border. The border is 1,267 river miles long.

TEAM BUILDING

Partnership is the operative word for success. The Southwestern Border Sheriffs' Coalition with 31 members grew to combine the synergy and collective knowledge of the Sheriffs along the entire border with Mexico. The National Sheriffs' Association, the Sheriff's Association of Texas, and the Border Sheriff's Prayer Posse are also valued partners and friends.

Out of this vision grew a system in Texas that has become known as the Local Border Security Program (Border Star) which is a true collaboration of city police departments, Sheriffs, Texas Department of Public Safety, Texas Game Wardens, Texas Military Forces, Tribal Police, and our Federal Partners. Six Joint Operations Centers were developed by the State of Texas and have been successful in maintaining autonomy of departments and offices while at the same time working in conjunction with one another. The Unified Command gives all participants a voice in cooperative law enforcement.

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Technology was added to this effort with the public/private partnership called the Border Watch Program. It is often called BlueServo after the private company that created the technology system. Sheriffs determined placement of cameras and use the internet as a virtual border watch. The program had 198,237 Virtual Deputies worldwide who watched and reported via the internet. There have been 158,811,595 hits on the website of blueservo.net. Responses were sent to Sheriff's Offices in the area to coordinate responses with CBP, Sheriffs, and Police Departments. In some areas observation command centers were set up and manned by CBP and Sheriffs. In those areas where observation centers were established the effective rate of controlling illegal crossings was 92%. The Criminal Justice Division did not offer a new grant to TBSC after October 1, 2011, and passed the program to the Texas Department of Public Safety. That transition with adjustments in philosophy continues.

BORDER VIOLENCE AND SPILLOVER

Border violence, spillover, and security remain a major concern in protecting our residents of each county. TBSC has defined Spillover as, "Any action on one side of the border that is the result of violence, or the threat of violence, which causes a reaction on the other side of the border. That action/reaction may result in a law enforcement response, an economic impact, a social consequence, or a combination of the three."

That impact is felt in: increased applications for asylum; in hospital costs being born by the local taxpayer on victims from Mexico being brought to the United States for treatment; in increased security; in stray bullets hitting universities and a city hall along the border; in concerns from ranchers who fear for their safety and in some cases feel abandoned; and in an increased migration from Mexico, not out of economic concerns but out of fear. Not all of these impacts are in all areas but are a collective of some of the realities that must be addressed.

Yet in spite of this violence and threat of violence, UCR crime is generally down along the border. Th is is attributed to

the containment made possible by a highly visible police presence that is funded through grants and keeps more officers and deputies on the street for longer periods of time. For our Sheriffs, one act of violence on US soil is one too many. Yet at the same time our Sheriffs have major concern for the economic impact and the social consequence. The picture is not to cause alarm but to make people aware of the complexity of the problem and the creativity of the Sheriffs in dealing with the totality of the circumstances.

FUTURE

In spite of these successes we cannot change the institutionalization of corruption that plagues our neighbors in Mexico. What we can do is protect our side of the border while Mexico works at making paradigm changes that have taken generations to become imbedded. As Mexico becomes ready to accept change then we can be good neighbors and respond to the invitation for help.

It is not to say that there are not differences in opinion among Sheriffs. Like in any good family, there are differences, but we come together for the common good of the United States in protecting and serving our communities. As a Legendary Sheriff once said, "We Serve With Pride, and We Are Proud to Serve."

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