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Drug Cartel Violence Along Open Southern Border Endangers Drinking Water Supplies

“The Rio Grande River has become notorious for crossing of persons and drugs”

WASHINGTON D.C. – Today the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power held a hearing on [H.R. 4719](#), a bill to establish a Southwest Border Region Water Task Force to assess the water supply needs of the region. As part of the hearing, the Subcommittee heard that drug cartel activity along the U.S./Mexican border presents major threats to water infrastructure, including the federally owned Falcon Dam on the Rio Grande River.

“The open nature of the border has serious consequences not only on our water supplies but this nation as a whole. This Congress needs to step up and secure our borders, stop the violence and protect our infrastructure,” **said Subcommittee on Water and Power Ranking Member Tom McClintock (CA-04).**

[Escalating violence](#) along the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly on [federally owned lands](#), is a result of the Border Patrol’s restricted access due to bureaucratic regulations from Washington D.C. As a result, these federal lands and corridors have been targeted by drug smugglers, human traffickers and murders that threaten human safety and cause environmental degradations.

Border Patrol’s inability to effectively monitor federal lands along the border also leaves the U.S. vulnerable to potential terrorist attacks. For example, on June 2, 2010, [The Houston Chronicle](#) detailed a Mexican drug cartel’s plot to blow up the federally owned Falcon Dam on the Texas-Mexico border:

“An alleged plot by a Mexican drug cartel to blow up a dam along the Texas border — and unleash billions of gallons of water into a region with millions of civilians — sent American police, federal agents and disaster officials secretly scrambling last month to thwart such an attack...But in the process, massive amounts of agricultural land would stand to be flooded as well as significant parts of a region where about 4 million people live along both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.”



Individuals At Rio Grande River Crossing with Drugs
(Photo Courtesy of Joan Neuhaus Schaan)

Today, the Subcommittee heard testimony from Ms. Joan Neuhaus Schaan, Homeland Security and Terrorism Fellow at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University. Ms. Schaan did not mince words when highlighting the gravity of situation on the border:

“Water rights along the border have been the basis for contentious and sometimes violent disagreements for centuries...This critical water infrastructure, however, is vulnerable to attack... Destroying a dam requires access, means, knowledge and motivation. Organized crime in the region has demonstrated a facility for the first three elements.

“Violence, fear, and distrust dominate the climate of the borderlands, and no policy can be legitimately debated without consideration of security.”

House Republicans, led by Rep. Bishop, have introduced legislation ([H.R. 5016](#)) that would give USBP operational control of the border and ensure that the U.S. Department of Interior does not impede or restrict Border Patrol from effectively doing their to job to secure the border.

For more information visit www.republicans.resourcescommittee.house.gov/border

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