

Statement of Luis Garcia
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Department of Homeland Security
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Subcommittee on Criminal Justice Drug Policy and Human Resources
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear today to discuss the efforts of the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officers under the El Paso Field Office in interdicting narcotics arriving in the United States through the various ports of entry in western Texas and New Mexico. My name is Luis Garcia and I am the Director of Field Operations for Customs and Border Protection in El Paso, Texas.

The CBP's El Paso Field Office is responsible for the management of five ports of entry, encompassing 10 border crossings, spread along more than 550 miles of border with Mexico. These five ports of entry are staffed by nearly 1000 inspectional officers, including 86 canine enforcement officers. During FY2003, these officers seized more than 223,000 pounds of marijuana, 3,100 pounds of cocaine and 200 pounds of heroin. These figures represent 24% of all the marijuana, 4% of all the cocaine, and 5% of the entire heroin seized at all the ports of entry nationwide last fiscal year.

This fiscal year, approximately 40% of the marijuana seized at the ports of entry under the El Paso Field Office has been found in commercial trucks. This method of smuggling has been a growing threat for several years now and we have introduced

several forms of non-intrusive inspection technology to address the threat. Every port in western Texas and New Mexico through which commercial trucks enter the United States has at least one large-scale unit capable of inspecting complete trucks at a minimum rate of six trucks per hour. Obviously, this does not permit us to examine all trucks with this technology, but additional units are being added. At this time, approximately one out of every five trucks arriving through the Port of El Paso is processed through this non-intrusive inspection technology. Inspection rates at the smaller ports are much higher.

We have entered into partnership with shippers, importers and transporters in an effort to more effectively address both the terrorist threat and the smuggling of narcotics through our ports of entry. One of the latest forms of these partnerships is called Free and Secure Trade, or FAST. Under the FAST program, the shipper, importer, transporter and driver are all vetted before program participation is allowed. We know with whom we are working and they know what is expected of them. And as a further means of ensuring compliance, non-intrusive inspection units are dedicated to the FAST program so the arriving FAST trucks can be inspected at a rate much higher than the non-FAST carriers. Currently in El Paso, 60% of all arriving FAST shipments are x-rayed upon arrival. We want to be very sure that this program is not compromised. With dedicated equipment, we are able to inspect at a much higher rate and still process and release the shipments much faster than we do those shipments that are not part of the program.

The Port of El Paso also receives commercial shipments by rail across two bridges from *Ciudad Juarez*. We now have non-intrusive inspection technology installed at each of these bridges and are inspecting all arriving trains as they cross the bridges.

If we find 40% of the marijuana in the commercial trucks, where do we find the balance of the marijuana, along with the cocaine and heroin? Nearly all of it has been found in private vehicles. The five ports of entry under my Field Office process – on average – more than 45,000 private vehicles every day. From these, we average 4.5 narcotic seizures per day or one seizure for every 10,000 private vehicles that we process. Since our non-intrusive inspection technology is aimed toward the large loads in commercial trucks where the average seizure is 2,400 pounds, nearly all loads in the private vehicle environment are found due to the hard work of individual inspectors and canine officers working with our highly trained narcotic detector dogs.

I don't want you to get the impression that we work alone – ignoring the valuable contributions of the other agencies with whom we work in our counter-drug activities. Our dedicated intelligence unit has elements from both Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and, from within the CBP, the Border Patrol, working alongside our inspectional personnel.

We know that technology alone will not stop drug smuggling. It never has. It never will. The hard working, dedicated men and women that I am proud to lead are our best means for interdicting drugs and for deterring the smuggling organizations. Were it not

for the efforts of these motivated public servants, an additional 113 tons of marijuana, cocaine and heroin would have been on the streets of the United States last year. The men and women of Customs and Border Protection's Office of Field Operations, assigned to the ports of entry in western Texas and New Mexico, working in cooperation with CBP's Border Patrol between the ports of entry, as well as with ICE agents, have made a difference. And they will continue to do so. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.