



Senator Tester, Congressman Daines, good afternoon. I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak at this hearing; it is indeed an honor to appear before you today.

Hill County is primarily a rural agricultural county located in north central Montana comprised of approximately 2,900 square miles, with a population of just over 16,000. The terrain is extremely rugged, ranging from glaciated plains to steep sloping hills. Weather can range from highs of over 100 degrees during summer months, to lows that are 30 degrees or more below zero. Weather in this area is extremely variable and can change drastically in a very short period of time. These types of conditions, coupled with a large response area affects not only law enforcements response to specific calls for service but seriously impacts regular patrol capabilities, especially throughout the majority of winter and spring seasons. These factors clearly indicate the need for a cooperative and collaborative approach by law enforcement to keep the community safe and the border secure.

Many years ago when I began my career in law enforcement, I can recall needing backup on a serious call or perhaps a cover unit on a traffic stop. I also recall many times when I requested such assistance, it was in the form of one of the local Border Patrol agents. Being from a small law enforcement agency we didn't always have the luxury of multiple officers on shift; many times you were the only deputy on duty, or your backup was on the alternate end of the county, sometimes 50 miles or more away. I can tell you it was a huge relief to look over your shoulder and see one of the Border Patrol agents arrive to assist.

Our local Border Patrol agents provide a high degree of training and skill sets, which they are always open to sharing with local law enforcement. Many years ago several agents provided training in sign cutting and man tracking. Months later this training allowed me to arrest a subject who had committed numerous residential burglaries and thefts near the Wildhorse Port of Entry. Without this training and the individual assistance of local agents, this crime may have gone unsolved.

Now, nearly 25 years later there have been numerous changes at both agencies. New leadership, new facilities, additional staff and growing responsibilities. However, even with these changes the situation is largely the same as it was 25 years ago. My deputies still work hand in hand with local Border Patrol agents.

They provide backup on calls when needed and provide training when requested. Border Patrol agents participate in countless local committees including the Local Emergency Planning Committee and the local Drug Task Force. Border Patrol agents participated in and were instrumental during a May 2011 interoperable communications exercise held in Hill County. Air wing personnel have assisted my office in criminal incidents as well as on search and rescue missions.

Over the past several years, the Hill County Sheriff's Office has been fortunate to receive "Operation Stonegarden" funding, which allows local law enforcement to be used as a force multiplier for federal authorities along the border. This collaborative effort has been successful as it allows the Border Patrol to direct local law enforcement to a specific site or location that for them may be problematic. It is also a tremendous benefit to Hill County as the added patrols allow more interaction with rural residents and provides us the ability to be more proactive in our law enforcement approach. This increase in proactive patrolling has led to a decrease in rural criminal activity, specifically residential burglaries and thefts.

Operation Stonegarden funding has also allowed the Hill County Sheriff's Office the ability to purchase specialty equipment tight local budgets wouldn't have permitted. This equipment is not only key to Stonegarden operations but also provides a higher level of officer safety. As an example, we were recently awarded Stonegarden funding that will permit the purchase of global positioning systems software and devices for our current portable radios. This will allow us to provide precise GPS data to the Border Patrol during an incident, or emergency landing zone coordinates for a medical emergency during a Stonegarden operation. None of this software or equipment would be possible without this funding.

In closing I feel the most important aspect to protecting our northern border is simple communication. From this hearing today, to formal quarterly meetings, to a simple cup of coffee, communication is key to our overall success. While funding and technology play major roles now as well as in the future, I believe we need to keep our lines of communication open. Our federal partners need to keep us informed of their plans and objectives. Local law enforcement needs to ensure we reciprocate and keep our federal partners informed of issues and concerns, which impact local law enforcement. When this circle of communication is complete the end result is a more effective use of federal and local resources. We always have, and must continue to work side by side to ensure the safety of our nation, our state and our local communities.

Thank you.