



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Statement and Questions as Prepared for Delivery  
Oversight Hearing on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
House Committee on the Judiciary  
*July 14, 2015*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Johnson, welcome back to the Committee. When you testified here last May, we spoke about drug-related violence in Puerto Rico, the same subject I raise with virtually every senior DHS and DOJ official that comes before this Committee.

Like I did then, I want to outline a narrative for you and ask you to comment. I will be brief so you have sufficient time to respond.

In 2011, there were 1,136 homicides in Puerto Rico, an average of over three a day, the most violent year in the territory's history. That was nearly the same number of murders as were committed that year in Texas, which has over 25 million residents compared to 3.5 million in Puerto Rico. Most murders in Puerto Rico are linked to the drug trade, since Puerto Rico is within the U.S. customs zone and is used by organizations transporting narcotics from South America to the U.S. mainland.

When I examined the level of resources that DHS and DOJ were dedicating to combat drug-related violence in Puerto Rico, it was clear the federal law enforcement footprint on the island was woefully inadequate. Accordingly, I did everything within my power to change the dynamic. I held a lot of meetings, wrote a lot of letters, and secured a lot of language in appropriations bills. Starting in 2012, under your predecessor, Secretary Napolitano, the message finally began to sink in.

DHS component agencies—the Coast Guard, ICE, CBP—started to step up their games. The Coast Guard has massively increased the number of hours that its ships and planes spend conducting counter-drug patrols around Puerto Rico. ICE surged agents to Puerto Rico, where they arrested hundreds of violent criminals and seized vast quantities of illegal drugs and firearms. CBP assumed control of the aerostat program from the Air Force, and moved quickly to repair the radar in southern Puerto Rico that had been inoperative since 2011.

The actions taken by DHS, in conjunction with its federal and local partners, have made a major difference in a very short time period. Each year, the murder rate has declined. In 2014, there were 681 homicides in Puerto Rico. That is 40 percent lower than in 2011. In 2015 to date, there have been 287 homicides. If current trends continue, there will half as many murders this year as there were in 2011. I am not sure if there is another jurisdiction in the world that has experienced such a steep and rapid drop.

It is critical that we keep our eye on the ball and that we sustain and strengthen these efforts, especially since, notwithstanding the improvements, Puerto Rico's homicide rate is still four times the national average.

Rest assured that I will continue to do my part. As you know, the Coast Guard is modernizing its fleet of vessels in Puerto Rico, replacing our six older vessels with six modern vessels. Two weeks ago, I attended the inauguration of the first of these new Sentinel-class cutters in Sector San Juan. Last week I met with Peter Edge, the Executive Associate Director of ICE-HSI, which is doing great work in Puerto Rico, to discuss the agency's current posture and future plans on the island. On the legislative front, I secured language in the DHS appropriations bill that will enable CBP to use both revenues from the Puerto Rico Trust Fund and general appropriations from Congress to support its air and marine operations in the territory.

I would welcome any comments you might have and hope you can assure me that Puerto Rico will continue to be a top priority for DHS.

Thank you.