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South Texans Say Enough is Enough-It's Time for Border Action! Back "Gang of Eight" Plan

The head of a large group of South Texas landowners has said that her group is fed up with the failure of the federal government to control its borders and hopes that the time has finally come for action. "Politicians have enjoyed using border security as a political football for years, but we are the ones who have suffered. Now the rest of the country is suffering, too," said Susan Durham, executive director of South Texans' Property Rights Association (STPRA), which represents owners of over five million acres of farm and ranch land near the Texas-Mexico border." The dysfunctional system we have now has put the cartels in charge. We have been seeing the consequences on our ranches for years. Now the cartels have extended their tentacles into every community in the United States. If you don't think that's true, then you have no idea how the illegal drug trade permeates our society."

Durham cited extreme conditions of violence and death on her members' properties. "People can't imagine what we live with every day," she said. She distributed information from the Brooks County sheriff about 127 bodies that were found on properties in that county in 2012. The data included the gender, country of origin, and age of the deceased. "Just read this list," Durham said. "These are human beings who died on our properties. We are tired of finding these people and others who have been left for dead by the cartels' 'coyotes'. The sheriff estimates that only half of the bodies are actually found. That means over 250 people died in just one South Texas county last year. We have done a horrible job of getting the facts out to the public," she said.

Not only do South Texas property owners frequently find bodies on their properties, but according to Durham, they live in fear of violence, kidnapping and extortion by cartel members. "Much of what is happening on either side of the border is never reported because of fear of retribution. We even have landowners who have abandoned their properties and others who are considering it," she said. "I can't tell you how angry I am when I hear Janet Napolitano saying that the border is secure. She may have a factual anomaly for El Paso, but that is not the reality we live with." Besides the number of bodies Durham used to back her claims, she presented DPS statistics on "bailouts"-situations where human smugglers who are being pursued by law enforcement crash through fences and abandon their vehicles, as do their illegal passengers. DPS data show a total of 984 bailouts in the Del Rio, Laredo, Rio Grande Valley and Coastal Bend sectors during 2012. Border Patrol numbers show 2600 bailouts for the last three years in the Laredo and Rio Grande Valley sectors.

“Do you want to know the solution?” asked Durham. “It is exactly what my organization has been advocating since their first organizational meeting almost eight years ago,” she said. At that first meeting of what later became STPRA, Tobin Armstrong, a Republican icon in South Texas, along with his wife Anne Armstrong,, defined the issues and solutions for border security.

At that 2005 meeting of concerned South Texas property owners, Armstrong laid out a solution that is amazingly similar to that which was proposed by George W. Bush early in his presidency and over 10 years later by the “Gang of Eight” in the U.S. Senate. Armstrong’s plan called for increased border security while simultaneously issuing bio-metric identification cards to immigrants, both new and those already here, who could pass criminal background checks. Once that system was in place, he said, employers must be held closely accountable for hiring only documented, legal employees who had complied with the system.

“We endorse what the ‘Gang of Eight’ is proposing,” said Durham. “Their plan does what should have been done back in 1986. It will create an enforceable system that will bring back respect for the rule of law. It takes the power away from the cartels and ends incentives for illegal crossings,” she added.

“We applaud what Todd Staples (Texas Agriculture Commissioner) and Brad Bailey (Texas Immigration Solution) have done to advocate the reform we need,” Durham added. “They understand that a guest worker system is integral to border security. Unless we separate the good guys— just coming here to work, from the bad guys-- the drug runners, gang members, and terrorists, the Border Patrol will never have a fighting chance. Todd and Brad get it and they’ve led the charge for a solution. We want the entire Texas Congressional delegation to join their effort. We cannot tolerate any more delay,” said Durham.