

JOHN MCCAIN
ARIZONA

CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

United States Senate

July 10, 2015

The Honorable R. Gil Kerlikowske
Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
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Dear Commissioner Kerlikowske,

On Sunday, July 5, 2015, a drug tunnel was discovered under a house in Nogales, Arizona, after sewage flooded from the International Outfall Interceptor (IOI). As you are aware, the IOI is a sewage pipeline that conveys up to 9.9 million gallons per day of wastewater from Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, for treatment at the Nogales International Wastewater Treatment Plant. The integrity of the IOI was compromised by drug smugglers transporting bundles of marijuana into the United States through the pipeline. According to Nogales city officials, over 60 pounds of marijuana that were being smuggled through the pipeline have been removed from the tunnel and from inside the IOI.

Mitigating damage from drug tunnels is not a new problem for the people of Nogales. Cross border drug tunnels are discovered on a regular basis, in fact, over 170 tunnels have been detected along the international border with Mexico since 1990, primarily in the Tucson Sector near Nogales. Smugglers frequently attempt to exploit the underground draining and sewage system in Nogales, including moving drugs through the IOI.

In this most recent incident, the result of the flooding has caused extensive damage to the IOI and the surround area, with cost estimates for the repairs in the millions of dollars. The state of Arizona and communities like Nogales that are situated along our international border with Mexico continue to pay a heavy price for inadequate enforcement along our border. The cost to hold criminal aliens in Arizona prisons, the burden put on our judicial system to prosecute drug smugglers, and the responsibility to repair damage to infrastructure by transnational criminal organizations should not be left to the residents of Arizona.

Traditionally, CBP has funded the mitigation efforts to repair drug tunnels entering the United States to ensure they are physically secured and made unusable. These mitigation efforts include tunnels that were used to breach the IOI, including the Doghouse Breach earlier this year. I urge you to work with the City of Nogales to close the existing IOI breach and fill the access tunnel to eliminate any ongoing threat to border security.

Thank you for your prompt response to this matter.

Sincerely,



JOHN MCCAIN
United States Senator