

U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall, and Representatives Harry Teague, Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan last week pressed the Department of Homeland Security for a Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST) team. As part of a larger border security effort, the administration announced New Mexico would receive two such teams.

BEST teams bring together personnel from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), along with state and local law enforcement agencies, to address the illegal trafficking of drugs, weapons, and bulk cash. This partnership helps ensure that law enforcement efforts to combat drug cartels and smuggling operations are carried out in a comprehensive, coordinated, and targeted manner.

“That New Mexico didn’t already have a BEST team was a major oversight. I’m very pleased the Obama administration is actively addressing violence along the border by assigning two teams to our state,” Bingaman said.

“With drug violence and unrest from Mexico threatening our state and endangering our families, we welcome the decision to assemble BEST teams in New Mexico,” said Udall. “This important step will help us more effectively combat the increasing levels of violence and drug trafficking affecting our state and nation.”

“These two BEST Teams will improve law enforcement in the region, combat the rising violence and slow the smuggling of illegal drugs into our State. I look forward to working with President Obama to ensure security and stability along our Southern border,” said Representative Heinrich.

“At a time of increased drug-related violence along the US-Mexico border, we must take the safety of New Mexico - as a border state - very seriously. I am encouraged by the announcement of BEST teams for our state which will help New Mexico respond to the growing threat of this drug-related violence,” Lujan said.

“We can’t stop the border violence without a comprehensive approach,” said Congressman Harry Teague “The already strained local law enforcement agencies in southern New Mexico are doing the best they can with strained resources . The installation of these BEST teams will bring needed resources to prevent the violence from spilling over into our communities in southern New Mexico,” Teague said.

In a letter to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano, the New Mexico congressional delegation last week said the ongoing violence in Mexico is raising concerns in border communities in New Mexico. In 2008, more than 5,300 people were killed in Mexico -- double the number in the previous year. More than 1,600 of those deaths were in Ciudad Juarez, near El Paso, Texas. Drug traffickers are at war with each other. Assassinations of police and government officials are commonplace. Lawyers and journalists have been killed, and many innocent civilians have been caught up in the crossfire.

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