

STATEMENT OF ROBERT HARRIS CHIEF PATROL AGENT SPOKANE SECTOR U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY BEFORE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

“Border Security on Federal Lands: the importance of securing the Northern Border”

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HAMILTON, MONTANA

Chairman Pombo, Ranking Member Rahall, and other distinguished Members of the Committee, it is a privilege and an honor to appear before you today to discuss our latest efforts along the border, which include the critical role border security on Federal lands has in assisting the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and especially U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), in our mission of securing our Nation's borders.

The Spokane Sector's area of responsibility includes 308 miles of international border with Canada, from the Cascade Mountains in Eastern Washington, all of Idaho, and Western Montana to the Continental Divide. Approximately 236 miles of our area of responsibility includes Federal Lands along the international boundary.

Our priority mission is to prevent the entry of terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the United States between official ports of entry. In addition, we continue to carry out our traditional mission of arresting illegal aliens, smugglers, narcotics, and other illicit contraband being smuggled across the remote areas of our border. Over the past 5 years the agents of the Spokane Sector have arrested 3,704 illegal aliens from 39 different countries, and seized over 18,055 pounds of illicit narcotics.

Due to the large expanses of border, the remote areas, rugged terrain, and different operational challenges from the U.S. – Mexico border, we greatly depend on our relationships with border residents, and other state, federal, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies, both U.S. and Canada, to carry out our border security mission.

Also, the Spokane Sector, like all Border Patrol Sectors, has established a Public Lands Liaison Agent (PLLA). The PLLA is a Border Patrol Agent position that is specifically assigned to enhance interaction and working relationships between the Border Patrol and land management agencies. The responsibility of the Liaison Agent focuses on implementation of specific portions of a recently signed MOU between the Departments of Homeland Security, Interior, and Agriculture on national security and counter-terrorism initiatives on federal lands along the international borders.

In addition to this specific initiative, the Border Patrol is also a primary participant in the U.S./Canada Integrated Border Enforcement Teams (IBET) that now spans 15 locations across the border. The IBET teams consist of both U.S. and Canada law enforcement with a specific focus on border security.

Our immigration system is broken. Every day, thousands of people try to enter our country illegally. Most of these people are coming to America to work and provide a better life for their families. After all, in their home countries, they make only a fraction of what they could make in the United States. Our strong economy creates the demand for these workers, places tremendous pressure at the border, and makes our job of securing the border very difficult.

To most effectively secure our border, we must reform our immigration system to relieve this pressure. We need comprehensive immigration reform that provides additional resources for border security, establishes a robust interior enforcement program, creates a temporary worker program, and addresses the problem of the estimated 11 to 12 million illegal immigrants already in the country.

We are taking significant steps to secure the border - more than any other time in our history. Since 2001, funding for border security has increased by 66 percent. DHS, working in conjunction with its Federal partners, has apprehended and sent home more than 6 million illegal aliens. On May 15, President Bush announced his plan to increase the number of CBP Border Patrol agents by 6,000 by the end of 2008. This will bring the total number of Border Patrol agents to over 18,000, doubling the number of agents since the President took office in 2001. These additional agents will serve as a tremendous resource and will go a long way in helping us secure the border.

As interim measure, until CBP can hire and train these additional Border Patrol agents, the President ordered the Secretary of Defense to work with our Nation's Governors to deploy up to 6,000 National Guard soldiers to the Southwest Border. Since the President's Oval Office address, DHS and CBP have worked closely with the Department of Defense and National

Guard Bureau to get these soldiers integrated in our efforts to secure the border. We are calling this mission Operation Jump Start.

These troops are making a difference. Over the last several weeks, the National Guard, working in their support capacity, has assisted in reducing illegal activity across the Southwest border. Even if this infusion were not occurring, there would be hundreds of National Guard troops assisting DHS in our counter-narcotics mission. The Guard troops have also allowed us to move over 360 Border Patrol agents from the back offices, where they were performing essential support functions and logistics jobs, to the front lines. These agents are now working every day on the border to detect and apprehend illegal aliens, and seize narcotics and other contraband.

The National Guard soldiers currently are, or will be, supporting the Border Patrol with logistical and administrative support, operating detection systems, providing mobile communications, augmenting border-related intelligence analysis efforts, building and installing border security infrastructure, and providing training. However, law enforcement along the border between the ports of entry will remain the responsibility of Border Patrol agents. The National Guard will play no direct law enforcement role in the apprehension, custodial care, or security of those who are detained. With the National Guard providing surveillance and logistical support, Border Patrol agents are free to concentrate on law enforcement functions of border enforcement. The National Guard engineering and technology support of tactical infrastructure has been a tremendous force-multiplier, expanding the enforcement capacity of the Border Patrol while freeing up additional agents who were performing some of these support tasks.

The Border Patrol has a history of nearly two decades working with National Guard and Reserve units to leverage their unique expertise, workforce, technology, and assets, in support of our mission and as a force-multiplier. We're proud to work shoulder-to-shoulder with our National Guard colleagues. They have given us a tremendous jumpstart on our overarching plan to secure the border – the Secure Border Initiative (SBI).

As I mentioned earlier, National Guard support will be an immediate, short-term measure that allows DHS to increase our deterrence and border security capabilities, while DHS trains additional Border Patrol agents and implements SBI which is a broad, multi-year initiative that looks at all aspects of the problem across the board -- deterrence, detection, apprehension, detention, and removal. SBI, as envisioned by the Secretary and Commissioner, addresses the challenges we face with integrating the correct mix of increased staffing, greater investment in detection technology and infrastructure, and enhanced coordination with our partners at the Federal, state, local, and international levels for every segment of our Nation's borders. CBP Border Patrol's component of SBI, named SBInet, will integrate multiple state of the art systems and traditional security infrastructure into a single comprehensive border security suite for the department . Under SBI, DHS wants to create a common operating picture for agents, via the use of integrated sensors and other interoperable technologies and systems. The technologies will help agents detect, identify and respond to illegal activities.

There is no stretch of border in the United States that can be considered completely inaccessible or lacking in the potential to provide an entry point for a terrorist or terrorist weapon. Stretches of border that in the past were thought to be impenetrable, or at least highly unlikely locations for entry into the United States, have in recent years, become active illegal entry corridors as other routes have been made less accessible to smugglers. We must consider all available information, including the vulnerability of our Nation's borders, when determining future infrastructure requirements and asset deployments.

SBI undertakes an integrated approach to the continuum of border security and future deployments of personnel, infrastructure and technology. The deployment of the various components will be risk based, considering, for example, current intelligence, operational environment and field commander's requirements. Under this approach, one portion of the border may require more technology in relation to personnel, while another portion may require more tactical infrastructure improvements than either personnel or technology. SBI will not be a 'one-size-fits all' deployment.

One *part* of SBI, is the placement of Tactical Infrastructure (TI), such as fencing, vehicle barriers, high intensity lighting, and road improvements. These infrastructure elements act as a force multiplier, helping agents to secure the border, with speed and flexibility of personnel redeployment made possible by shortened response times. TI elements are critical for the U.S. Border Patrol to achieve the proper balance between personnel, technology, and border infrastructure. But, TI alone will not secure the border.

We recognize the challenges that lie ahead. Our goal is nothing less than to gain, maintain, and expand operational control of our Nation's borders through the right mix of personnel, technology, and tactical infrastructure. The assistance of the National Guard and our Federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement partners, will greatly enhance our ability to effectively and efficiently protect our Nation's borders.

The men and women of U.S. Customs and Border Protection face these challenges every day with vigilance, dedication

to service, and integrity, as we work to strengthen national security and protect America and its citizens. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony today. I look forward to responding to any questions that you might have.