

Testimony of

The Honorable Orrin Hatch

March 12, 2003

I want to thank the Chairmen and Ranking Democrat Members of both of the Subcommittees convened here today for holding this hearing. I particularly want to thank Senators Kyl and Feinstein for their long and tireless efforts in the Border Security and Technology areas. I also want to thank Senator Chambliss, our incoming Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Border Security, Immigration, and Citizenship, for his subcommittee's participation in this hearing. We can be assured that he will provide effective leadership and diligent service to this subcommittee.

The issues that we will discuss today are of the utmost importance. We accomplished several good legislative efforts in the 107th Congress to keep our country safe from terrorists. One of these was the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act, of which I was an original cosponsor. The legislation provided many crucial tools, now, it is crucial that Congress and the Department of Homeland Security work together to evaluate what progress has been made and to ensure that the measures set out in the Border Security Act are appropriately implemented.

Securing our nation's air, land, and sea borders is a critical yet difficult task. Each year, more than 500 million people cross the borders into the United States, some 330 million of whom are non-citizens. The lessons of September 11 teach us that those who would come here to do harm will be innovative in their attempts to circumvent our immigration laws. It is essential that our country remain vigilant against terrorists, and the Department of Homeland Security must be prepared to intercept terrorists before they enter our country.

At the same time, we must remember that our nation was founded by those who immigrated to our shores. Historically, immigrants have richly contributed to our country's culture, learning, and progress. It was never the intent of the Enhanced Border Security Act to stymie lawful immigration and it would be a real setback if we applied it in such a perverse manner. America always gains strength by welcoming a diversity of peoples and ideas. We need to ensure that our immigration laws continue to provide the promise of America to all those who lawfully seek to become Americans.

In passing the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act, Congress attempted to remove the barriers that had, in the past, inhibited our security by forbidding comprehensive data sharing between various governmental agencies. We also provided for the use of biometric technology to enhance our ability to confirm the identity of those desiring admission into our country. These are just some of the measures included in the bill to enable the Department of Homeland Security to promptly process the requests of those seeking lawful entry into our country and, at the same time, deny entry to terrorists and criminals. It is important for us to understand how the Department of Homeland Security plans to implement these measures. It is also important for Congress to learn what other areas exist that might require further action.

With this in mind, I want to thank the witnesses for appearing today and look forward to hearing their testimony into this important area of national security.

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