

Testimony of  
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Mr. Sam F. Vale President Starr-Camargo Bridge Co. Rio Grande City, Texas Hearing Testimony  
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and  
Citizenship "Securing the Borders and America's Ports of Entry, What Remains to Be Done"  
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Good morning Chairman Schumer, Ranking Member Cornyn and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify at this important hearing focused on security at our nation's borders and ports of entry. My name is Sam Vale and I am the President of the Starr-Camargo Bridge in Rio Grande City, Texas. I am also a founding Board Member of the Border Trade Alliance (BTA), as well as Chair of the Public Policy Committee. The BTA has been around since 1986 and has grown to represent over 2 million border stakeholders who are involved with all aspects of trade, travel, security and commerce in our border communities along the U.S. - Canada and U.S. - Mexico borders.

Mr. Chairman, the purpose of today's hearing is a question that those of us at the border have been asking ourselves and of the federal government for a long time and I anticipate that we will continue to do so well into the future. The security of our borders is not something that is static and is dependent on Comprehensive Immigration Reform. The very nature of trade, travel and cross-border commerce within the context of the concerns with terrorism require that we stay ever vigilant and prepared. Over the past eight years the federal government has taken many steps to enhance security at our land ports of entry and between them. However, not all these steps have been taken in the same direction. The implementation of multiple layers of security, especially at our land ports of entry, where all legitimate cross-border commerce and trade occurs has not been without its negative impacts on another aspect of border and national security, that of our economic security. This is certainly a significant factor in our future economic survival.

Our border communities, along our shared borders with Canada and Mexico, support diverse international economies that are dependent upon cross-border trade and travel. A large percentage of traffic at our borders is repeat, daily crossers who account for a significant portion of the sales taxes, property taxes and the commercial revenues generated which are subject to IRS collections. Our border communities are responsible for conducting more than \$2 billion cross-border trade at our land ports each and every day.

As I mentioned, the policies and procedures designed to facilitate secure trade and travel at our borders have changed dramatically during the past decade. However, the failure to successfully legislate a Comprehensive Immigration Reform Package has created significant challenges the foundation for all other security programs. The increased federal inspection changes at our

borders have not occurred without reasonable concerns about their impact on legitimate trade and commerce. Similarly, the incredible growth in trade at our borders has not been without its share of growing pains. The infrastructure at our border crossings, for the most part, has not kept up with the increased volume of trade and travel.

U.S. land ports of entry last year conducted a record \$830 billion in cross-border trade. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation Bureau of Transportation Statistics in 2008, U.S. land border crossings processed 45.7 million pedestrians, more than 10.7 million trucks and more than 107.5 million personal vehicles.

It has become apparent during the past decade that all too often during the deliberation and development of U.S. border policy, the prevailing mindset in Washington, D.C. is that one-size fits all. While there are shared underlying issues along both the U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico borders, such as the ongoing need to invest significantly to increase capacity and update infrastructure at our busiest land ports of entry. However, there are many challenges and complex dynamics that are unique to each of our borders with our NAFTA partners. With over 30 years of hands on border operational experiences, I strongly urges this Committee, Congress and the Administration to not neglect our unique bi-lateral relationships with Canada and Mexico, along with the individual needs and concerns of these relations in pursuit of a one-size fits all, national border policy.

Our land ports of entry do not have the infrastructural capacity to adequately handle out-bound inspections into Canada or Mexico, yet there have been calls for Congress to require DHS to do exactly that. In fact without proper Immigration Reform the data base for all security programs is inadequate and constantly changing.

Congress simply has to do more to address the decades old backlog in our Immigration Codes as well as adequate annual infrastructural investments needed at U.S. land ports of entry. Today the majority of our land ports were designed without anticipation of the vast federal security operations now present at all U.S. border crossings.

The increased security presence at our border crossing in Texas has overwhelmed our existing infrastructure. Our import lots become parking lots for unmanned border patrol units. Most existing port of entry, were designed and built a half century or more ago. Our ability to protect our nation in both terms of physical and economic security while generating more cross-border economic activity with our two largest export markets in Canada and Mexico is limited by our infrastructure and human resources.

Delays and long lines hamper cross-border commerce and trade, causing just-in-time manufacturing to give way to just-in-case; prompting lower crossing numbers for work or pleasure to our neighboring communities in Canada and Mexico, which in turn reduce both tax revenues and toll revenue which results in our lessened ability at the local level to reinvest in infrastructure to support legitimate trade and travel.

The \$720 million included for land port infrastructure upgrades as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was a very appreciated step forward.

However, with the exception of the Mariposa, Arizona and San Ysidro, California ports of entry, the majority of projects funded by Customs and Border Protection and the General Services Administration using these stimulus dollars were for small land ports of entry with low crossing volumes. A note of interest here is that Secretary Napolitano has noted that the Mariposa port in Arizona was design completed when she was Governor, lacking only the funding. If we are to increase the security of our land ports and enhance our ability to generate more national economic activity through trade, we need to reinvest more in upgrading our land border crossings and focus first on areas with the greatest impact. We need to use annual appropriations to fix these items and not one time stimulus dollars which need to be allowed to do their job as advertised.

DHS, in conjunction with its federal agency partners, needs to collaborate to expedite the approval process for the prioritization, selection and funding of land border infrastructure projects that improve the facilitation of cross-border trade and travel. Congress can help by committing more funds toward border port infrastructure while also looking at reducing the time it takes for any project at our ports to comply with all the regulatory requirements before construction, specifically the process of obtaining presidential permits from the State Department.

Further, we need to take a hard look at all our current layers of security at and between our ports of entry. Congress should urge the Department of Homeland Security to assume the leadership role among federal agencies in conducting a performance and utility assessment of the multiple layers of federal security programs and policies that currently govern legitimate trade and travel along the U.S. shared borders with Canada and Mexico. In short, DHS needs to ask the tough questions: Are these programs effective? Can they be better integrated and harmonized to increase both security and the efficiency of trade and travel? Can they be more effective and efficient with additional resources and improved infrastructure?

Mr. Chairman, I would submit that before Congress mandates any further layers of security at our borders that we examine thoroughly what we already have in place. Adding yet another requirement for DHS to implement without changing the infrastructure at our ports and committing more resources, more boots on the ground, is unlikely to yield much in return in terms of security, while having a serious impact on the facilitation of legitimate trade and travel.

In short, Congress has to ensure that scarce federal dollars are committed toward programs, policies, and projects that result in the greatest benefit in terms of economic and physical security. Successful border security efforts require the utilization of risk-based assessments based upon real-time intelligence to direct the most efficient allocation of scarce federal resources in order to attain the greatest security benefit.

Finally at the foundation to all security inspections is identifying the people who enter and leave our country. To do that a fundamental need is Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Chairman and Ranking Member along with all the Members of this Committee for its focus on the need to achieve adequate Immigration Reform as well as balance between security and facilitation of legitimate travel at our borders. I offer the assistance of all of our colleagues that live and work along the border along with the BTA

working identifying solutions to these important border issues.

Again, I am honored to participate in this hearing and it will be my pleasure to address any questions you may have.

Thank you.