

Testimony of
Mr. Robert Harris

July 25, 2003

Robert L. Harris
Deputy Chief, U. S. Border Patrol

Mr. Robert L. Harris is the Deputy with the Headquarters office of the U.S. Border Patrol. Prior to being selected for his current position, Mr. Harris served as the Chief of INS' Intelligence Operations. He is a career Border Patrol Agent who began his service in 1984 in the San Diego Border Patrol sector.

Mr. Harris has held a variety of positions in the Border Patrol, including Assistant Chief, Supervisory Border Patrol Agent, and Senior Patrol Agent. He is also a member of the Border Patrol Tactical Unit (BORTAC), and has directly participated in the coordination of foreign and domestic enforcement operations, to include service in Bolivia, Guatemala, and Estonia.

Mr. Harris holds a bachelor's degree in management and a master's degree in national security strategy from the National War College.

? Born: August 1960 in Sonora, Texas

? Married: Wife (Renee) and two children (Maya 19) and (Tyler 8)

? Entered on duty with the Border Patrol in San Diego, Ca 1984

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Statement of

ROBERT L. HARRIS

DEPUTY CHIEF, UNITED STATES BORDER PATROL
BUREAU OF CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION
THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Before the

UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, CORRECTIONS AND VICTIM'S RIGHTS

Regarding

"Alien Smuggling/Human Trafficking: Sending a Meaningful Message of Deterrence"

July 25, 2003

10:00 a.m.

Room SD-226, Dirksen Senate Office Building

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Biden, and distinguished Subcommittee Members, it is my honor to have the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss efforts to prevent and deter the illegal entry and smuggling of undocumented aliens into the United States through the operations and law enforcement initiatives of the United States Border Patrol, now a component of the newly created Bureau of Customs and Border Protection.

My name is Robert L. Harris, and I am the Deputy Chief of the United States Border Patrol. I would like to begin by giving you a brief overview of our agency and mission.

As you know, on March 1, 2003, Immigration Inspectors and the U. S. Border Patrol from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Agricultural Inspectors from the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and Customs Inspectors from the U. S. Customs Service merged to form the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (BCBP) within the Border and Transportation Security (BTS) Directorate of the Department of Homeland Security. Now, for the first time in our country's history, all agencies of the United States government with significant

border responsibilities have been brought together under one roof. With our combined skills and resources, we will be far more effective than we were when we were separate agencies.

Within BCBP, the mission of the Border Patrol remains virtually unchanged. We are responsible for providing Homeland Security along our Nation's borders between ports of entry. Through our operational Sectors, we patrol and secure 4,000 miles of international land border with Canada and 2,000 miles of international land border with Mexico. We also patrol roughly 2,000 miles of coastal waters surrounding the Florida Peninsula and Puerto Rico. We do this with over 10,400 Border Patrol Agents, nationwide. While our priority mission is to detect and prevent terrorists and terrorist weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, from entering the United States between the ports of entry, we also interdict illegal migrants and contraband.

Illegal migration and alien smuggling into our country is a serious problem to those who live and work in the border community, but its impact and the associated criminal activity that accompanies it is far-reaching. An uncontrolled border presents great concern, spreading border violence, and degrading the quality of life in border communities and other locations affected by this activity.

Since 1994, the U.S. Border Patrol has operated under a comprehensive national strategy designed to gain and maintain control of our Nation's borders. Major initiatives such as Operation Hold the Line, in our El Paso Sector, Operation Gatekeeper in our San Diego Sector, and Operation Rio Grande in our McAllen Sector have had a significant effect on illegal migration along the Southwest Border. These initiatives sought to bring the proper balance of personnel, equipment, technology and infrastructure into areas experiencing the greatest level of illegal activity on the southwest border. In the ensuing years, our operational manpower has more than doubled. Enforcement related technology has been applied to support our agents, especially in isolated and remote areas of the border. Existing resources such as air and marine units, horse patrols and all terrain vehicles have been enhanced to support day-to-day field operations. Infrastructure has been deployed in the way of fencing, vehicle barriers, cameras and lighting to assist field agents in their efforts to deter and prevent the flow of illegal aliens and contraband. While there is certainly more that must be done in this area, the strategy has yielded important results.

In the wake of 9-11, vulnerabilities and deficiencies along the northern border have received increased attention, challenging us to increase our enforcement presence along the northern border. With the recent reassignment of more than 375 agents to the northern border, there will be 1,000 agents strategically and permanently placed along the northern border by the end of the year, enforcing a northern border strategy built on interagency and international cooperation and coordination, effective technology development and deployment, and innovative resource allocation.

Overall, our efforts have been very successful, with decreases in apprehensions and illegal entries, indicating that our efforts have had an impressive deterrent effect. Alien apprehensions have declined from a high of 1.6 million in fiscal year 2000, down to a 28-year low of less than 1 million in fiscal year 2002. In fiscal year 2001, the Border Patrol arrested 1.26 million aliens on all borders, which was a 24% decline from the previous year. In fiscal year 2002, 955,310 aliens were arrested, which represented a 25% decrease from fiscal year 2001. Border Patrol is also

among the leaders on the Southwest border in narcotics seizures. In fiscal year 2002, we seized 1,211,009 pounds of marijuana, and 14,463 pounds of cocaine. Through it all, the Border Patrol has maintained and encouraged a positive relationship with local communities, including ranchers, farmers and other law enforcement entities. The crime rate along the Southwest Border, where we have had significant operations, paralleled the decline in apprehensions. Places like San Diego, El Paso, and McAllen have experienced decreased crime rates, increasing safety for our agents and the local population, and improving the overall quality of life in those areas.

Over the past several years, unscrupulous alien smugglers have moved migrants into more remote areas with hazardous terrain and extreme conditions. As smuggling tactics and patterns have shifted, our strategy has been flexible enough to meet the challenges head on. Building on longstanding public safety and humanitarian measures practiced by the U.S. Border Patrol, we have implemented initiatives to increase border safety along the Southwest Border and we have taken steps to enhance our levels of preparedness. We have developed a Border Safety Initiative (BSI) with the goals of reducing injuries and preventing deaths along the southwest border region. Striving to create a safer border environment, BSI is not only proactive in informing potential migrants of the hazards of crossing the border illegally, but also provides quick response to those who are in life-threatening situations. Working with local television, radio and newspaper agencies, both in the United States and Mexico, we have developed and delivered public service announcements and advertisement campaigns to increase public safety awareness, and to educate the public regarding our mission, benefiting our law enforcement efforts. Border Patrol maintains a number of 24-hour checkpoint operations in many of our Sectors, and they are an integral part of border control. Their strategic placement and operations serve to prevent and disrupt alien and narcotic smuggling, and provide increased control and deterrence at the border. The presence of a checkpoint forces smugglers and illegal entrants to change their entry and travel patterns -- to our tactical advantage. A sustained border enforcement presence, supported by checkpoints that screen traffic traveling away from the border, adds an additional level of security nationally. Checkpoints are an essential part of border enforcement--the significant number of drug seizures and alien apprehensions at checkpoints clearly demonstrate this. What cannot be measured is the significant deterrent effect these operations have on smuggling and other illegal activity.

The challenges we face with existing infrastructure at our checkpoints will continue to be addressed in an effort to update, expand and modernize, and we will continue to work diligently under the limitations that now exist. With an ever-increasing volume of traffic, agents have mere seconds to conduct immigration checks, and to decide if probable cause exists to warrant additional inspection. Technology will continue to play a key role in this effort. After the recent and notoriously tragic smuggling case in Victoria, Texas, the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Bonner expedited the deployment -- within 72 hours of the incident -- of mobile truck x-ray machines to South Texas Border Patrol checkpoints. This technology, long in use at ports of entry, will be an added asset to the Patrol in combating the work of smugglers. The deployment of this technology would not have been as easily undertaken without the creation of DHS and the merging of border enforcement agencies within the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection.

While the Border Patrol provides a significant law enforcement presence on the border, we are also recognized as a major source of information and intelligence, including on matters relating to National security risks. For example, our Intelligence Section provides valuable information regarding apprehended aliens, and since the reorganization, it has been fused with the Intelligence assets of the BCBP. Recognizing that border security cannot be a singular effort, but a collaborative, multi-agency effort; we coordinate our efforts, disseminate information, and share intelligence with other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, strengthening the cord of better enforcement, better intelligence and better security.

Nationally, the Border Patrol is tasked with a very complex, sensitive and difficult job, which historically has presented immense challenges. Homeland security has become a top priority. The Border Patrol is proud to be the "front line" of defense for this very important mission. The challenge is huge, but one which we face everyday with vigilance, dedication to service, and integrity.

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to present this testimony today, and I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

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