



One Hundred Tenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515
November 19, 2007

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

We are writing to express our concern about two recent incidents involving Canadian emergency personnel who were delayed entering the United States during the course of their duties. We urge you to immediately review relevant Departmental policies and protocols to ensure that emergency personnel are able to respond to urgent situations in a timely manner, without compromising our Nation's border security.

It is our understanding that on November 11, 2007, a crew of firefighters from Quebec, Canada responding to a fire in Rouses Point, New York was delayed for approximately eight minutes at the U.S. port of entry. This delay occurred despite a longstanding mutual aid agreement between these two fire departments. Apparently, the delay was caused by questions regarding the admissibility of one of the Canadian firefighters to the U.S. The Committee on Homeland Security was subsequently informed that the Rouses Point incident was an isolated one.

Yet, this isolated incident did recur. It is our understanding that the very next day a Canadian ambulance carrying a cardiac patient from Ontario, Canada to Detroit, Michigan for emergency surgery was also delayed while attempting to enter the United States. Again, this delay occurred despite long-standing existing protocols between the local officials. Further, it is our understanding that the ambulance was directed to the secondary inspection area where emergency response personnel were questioned and asked to produce documentation. Moreover, in an act which can only be characterized as astonishing, employees of the Department of Homeland Security opened the rear of the ambulance and questioned the patient.

As Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security; Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism; and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response, we are acutely aware of the need to secure America's borders. At the same time, it is imperative that emergency personnel are not delayed unnecessarily when responding to critical needs within border communities.

With that in mind, please provide the Committee a narrative explanation of the above incidents including the reason for the delays experienced by emergency response personnel in these incidents. Additionally, provide us with a narrative explanation of the policies and protocols that currently exist to ensure that emergency personnel are able to respond to critical situations that may require the crossing of international borders. Finally, inform us whether you intend to initiate a review of these incidents and the relevant protocols. Please provide the requested information no later than December 3, 2007.

If you have questions about this matter, please contact Ms. Alison Rosso or Mr. Craig Sharman, Subcommittee Directors, at (202) 226-2616.

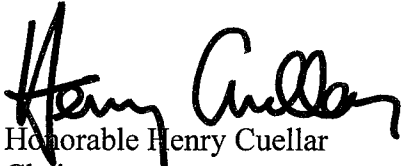
Sincerely,



Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security



Honorable Loretta Sanchez
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and
Global Counterterrorism



Honorable Henry Cuellar
Chairman
Subcommittee on Emergency
Communications, Preparedness, and
Response