



The Real Deal on Homeland Security

BORDER SECURITY STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

In January 2007, Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security unveiled “The Real Deal on Homeland Security”, which outlines the agenda for the Committee on Homeland Security for the 110th Congress. Included among the eight priorities was a call to implement a common sense border security strategy. In advance of a debate on border security during this Congress, Chairman Thompson developed a set of common sense principles to make our borders secure. The development and implementation of a comprehensive border security strategy will not only fulfill a Federal responsibility but will also ensure that the costs of providing border security will not impose an unfunded mandate on state, local, and tribal governments.

A comprehensive federal strategy on border security should have an end-goal of preventing unsafe cargo and dangerous people from entering the Nation at and between this country’s ports of entry while simultaneously facilitating and enhancing the productive flow of commerce.

A common sense border security strategy acknowledges the unique environments represented by the Northern and Southern borders, the Caribbean, and appreciates that a one-size-fits-all approach to securing the border will neither bring about greater safety nor security for America.

Finally, a comprehensive Federal strategy on border security can only be accomplished with a Department of Homeland Security that is properly staffed and resourced. The strategy must call upon the best people, technology, and processes to address vulnerabilities, gather and share necessary intelligence, and appropriately assess threats to our Nation’s borders.

- **Develop a National Strategy for Securing Our Borders:** The Department of Homeland Security must develop a comprehensive border security strategy that sets forth a clear plan for keeping dangerous people and materials out of the country and recognizes that a “one-size-fits all” approach will not work, given the uniqueness of our borders. This strategy must create a vision for better integration of the diverse border components within the Department. Stove-piped operations and parallel, uncoordinated efforts undermine our nation’s border security.

- **Hire and Retain Quality Border Security Personnel:** In order to combat attrition levels that threaten to decimate the ranks of experienced agents and officers, resources must be dedicated to hire and retain highly qualified personnel who serve as the Nation's "boots on the ground." To do so, the Department must not only recruit and hire new personnel but also ensure that there is an adequate cadre of experienced officers and agents to supervise these recruits and other less experienced personnel.
- **Enable a 21st-Century Border Security Workforce:** Congress must appropriate necessary funding to train and equip front-line and "behind the scenes" support personnel to meet the border security challenges of the 21st Century. As the threats to our borders become increasingly more sophisticated, our front line personnel must be ready with the best available equipment and information. The Department must make certain that border security personnel receive the necessary training not only when they start their careers but on an ongoing basis. The proper training and equipment provides these brave men and women the tools they need to be successful in securing our nation's borders.
- **Deploy Effective Tactical Infrastructure and Technology Along Our Borders:** The Department must deploy tactical infrastructure, including physical fencing and vehicle barriers, where necessary to achieve operational control of our borders. Where appropriate, technology such as radar systems, cameras, and sensors should be utilized to achieve monitoring and control of all of America's borders on a 24-7 basis. It is imperative that new technology be proven effective before deployment and that border security projects be delivered on-time and on-budget.
- **Strengthen Screening at Ports of Entry:** The nation's prosperity rests on the security of its borders. Border security personnel at and between ports of entry and in border communities monitor and scrutinize the flow of goods and people entering our country. Consequently, the Department must facilitate information sharing with public and private sector stakeholders and put in place the technology and infrastructure necessary for the identification and interception of dangerous people and materials, while expediting legitimate trade and travel. The balance between security and trade is critical for the success of our nation's economy.
- **Complete a System for Tracking Our Country's Visitors:** Border security is not simply stopping people from crossing our borders illegally. It includes identifying those who enter the United States legally and remain in the country beyond their authorized period of stay. Congress must continue to conduct oversight of the Department's efforts to complete the

congressionally-mandated US-VISIT biometric entry-exit program. To date, the US-VISIT program has not made any progress on establishing the capability to track whether foreign nationals exit when required.

- **Get “Catch-and-Return” Right:** Under the policy of “catch-and-return,” undocumented persons who are apprehended are to be detained and returned to their home countries. Congress must ensure that the Department has the detention beds and personnel necessary to maintain this policy and not revert back to the previous failed policy of “catch and release.” Detention conditions must be humane and take into consideration the individuals with special needs.
- **Partner with State, Local and Tribal Governments:** State, local, and tribal governments, and particularly those along our borders, often bear the brunt of America’s border security challenges. The Department should coordinate with these governments whenever possible and share information, provide assistance, and maximize resources to advance the common goal of border security.
- **Enhance International Cooperation:** The Department should actively work with our international partners to extend our zone of security beyond our land and sea borders. This will not only alleviate some of the pressure at our borders but also further ensure that dangerous people and materials are kept out of this country. The country will effectively extend its safety zone by using technology and intelligence to assist Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean nations in resolving vulnerabilities along our common borders.
- **Increase Transparency and Accountability of the Department in Securing Our Borders:** As the third largest Federal purchaser, the Department must be a good steward of the American people’s tax dollars. Too often, the Department’s procurement structure, combined with a lack of trained, qualified personnel and a reliance on private contractors, has led to a dependence on sole-source, single-bid contracts that yield poor results. Transparency in the contracting process and accountability for the outcome of these projects are essential to prevent squandering money or, worse, jeopardizing our nation’s security. At the same time, the Department should ensure that small, minority and disadvantaged businesses are able to fairly compete in this marketplace.