

Senator Jon Tester
Opening Statement and Panel Introductions
Homeland Security Field Hearing
Havre, MT
Wednesday, July 2, 2008

Opening and Introduction of Panel I

Thanks to everyone for coming out and giving up your morning to be here. Especially with 4th of July approaching.

Welcome the witnesses too. We have folks from every level of government – federal, state and local. And we have the folks who do the hard work of securing the border every day.

We're going to have a couple of panels of witnesses this morning. Each of them will present for about 5 minutes and then we'll have a brief discussion about it.

Following those panels, I will adjourn the official hearing and then we will open up the floor to questions and comments from the audience. I would like to start that listening session around 11:30.

I'd encourage all the witnesses to stick around for that, because it is critically important that folks who

are working in government at any level hear first-hand from the public on a regular basis.

This hearing is titled “Securing the Northern Border: Views From the Front Lines.”

And our goal today is to hear from the many folks who stand watch on the border, whether at the state, federal or local level.

Over the last couple of days, have been traveling a good portion of the Hi-Line, visiting with folks about what’s on their minds when it comes to the border.

I was pleased to be joined in Scobey on Monday by the Number Two man at the Department of Homeland Security, Mr. Paul Schneider.

I am glad that a few folks at DHS are finally taking an interest in the Northern Border.

The U.S.-Canada border should be a source of pride for both Americans and Canadians. At over 4,000 miles long, it’s the longest demilitarized border in the world. That’s pretty special.

But that does not mean that we can be complacent. Drug trafficking across our border is a major problem

– whether you're talking about BC Bud, or something worse.

There are some known terrorist groups that are organized in Canada. And when a potential terrorist travels from England to Canada he will attract a lot less attention than if he tries to fly directly to the U.S.

I want to emphasize that our friends on the Canadian side are steadfast allies in the effort to secure the border. And I appreciate the friendship that we have with them.

So the stakes are high when it comes to making our border secure.

At the same time, we need to continue to encourage the vital economic link between the U.S. and Canada. The border is a major commercial artery for Montana and for our entire nation.

It's not an easy balance, that's for sure.

Let me introduce the first panel of witnesses. These are folks from around Montana who do the hard work of keeping the border safe each and every day.

Representing the State of Montana, we have the Director of Emergency Services, Dan McGowan. Dan's the guy who is responsible for making sure the State of Montana is ready and able to respond in case of anything ranging from a natural disaster or a suspected case of foot-and-mouth disease to an attack on a dam or a refinery.

We have the Sheriff of Toole County, Ms. Donna Matoon. Sheriff Matoon is here to talk about how local law enforcement ends up providing a lot of border security responsibilities.

And finally, I want to welcome Robert DesRosier. Robert is the head of disaster and emergency services on the Blackfoot Reservation. As such, Robert is responsible for securing the 60 miles of border between Canada and the reservation. To do so, he must work with Border Patrol, BIA police and the Park Service. That's a lot of agencies.

We also have Brenna Neinast, who runs the Havre Sector of the Border Patrol. She and her more than 100 Border Patrol officers are responsible for securing the border from Glacier Park to the Montana-North Dakota border.

Finally, we have Ms. Michele James. Ms. James is the Director of Field Operations for Customs. She covers all the territory between North Dakota and Seattle.

When we get to the next panel, I will introduce them. But time is short, so let's get started. Dan, would you like to begin?

I'd like now to welcome our second panel.

Representing the National Treasury Employees Union is Loren Timmerman. Loren represents more than 100 Customs inspectors throughout Montana, as well as employees in Idaho, Colorado and Utah. Customs inspectors stand guard at airports and at all the ports right along the border, whether we're talking about Sweetgrass or the Port of Turner.

Loren's been a Customs officer for well over a decade, and he's pretty much seen it all at this point.

We also have two gentlemen who are small business owners here in Montana. The first is Dr. Alex Philp, who runs GCS Solutions in Missoula.

Dr. Philp started his career as a park ranger in Glacier National Park when he was 20 years old, and now 20 years later he is a leader in the field of geospatial research. His work with GIS technology has helped not only our state but also several federal agencies.

Dr. Philp's work on remote sensing and delivery is an important asset as we assess the landscape of the northern border.

The second is Kris Merkel, the president of S2 Corporation in Bozeman. S2 is heavily involved in radar imaging. Their technology could be useful in everything from scanning packages at ports to providing radar across large stretches of our border. Some of their efforts, like small ultra-wideband antennas to pick up illegal communications are specifically designed for remote areas.

Both of these good Montana companies have long relationships with the Defense Department.

Today, they are here to talk about their efforts to bring Montana technology to the Department of Homeland Security. We know that technology is going to be a major part of the effort to secure the border, and they both have interesting stories to tell

on that front. I thank them for joining us to discuss DHS' lines of communication for research and development and procurement needs.