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THE FILNER AMENDMENT: GUARANTEEING MONEY FOR SENTRI

**HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA**

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. Rogers) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. Sabo) for bringing us this bill on such an urgent matter.

I come with a small amendment that has rather big ramifications on our southern border with Mexico. I represent all of the California-Mexico border. As the President of the United States and his Secretary of Homeland Security agreed with the President of Mexico, we need a smart border, a smart border meaning security, yes, tight security, but efficiency also. We need a blending at our borders of security and efficiency. In my district, I have got about a quarter of a million, that is over 250,000, legal crossings every day through the six or seven border crossings in my district. That is a lot of traffic. That traffic is very legal. It is for important purposes, important for our economy, important for our families, jobs, housing, culture, education, all that is going on in this exchange across the U.S.-Mexico border. We have shown that we can have the

security we want with efficiency. We started a new program several years ago called SENTRI, meaning Secure Electric Network for Travelers Rapid Inspections. What that means in English is that we give people who have legitimate business across the border to travel, and they do it frequently, we give them as extensive a background check as is necessary to guarantee they are secure. We also give their vehicle a background check, and that vehicle and that person is matched when they cross the border by a smart card and a transponder. That is the SENTRI system. The Customs and INS now and under Department of Homeland Security set aside certain lanes of the border crossings for that purpose, for the SENTRI crossings.

Unfortunately, the demand for those smart cards way exceeds the ability right now of the Department of Homeland Security to meet. There is a backlog of 6, 7, 8 months. The Subcommittee on Homeland Security, and I thank the gentleman from Kentucky for this, in their report said what a great program SENTRI is. They

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complimented the fact that it exists. What we at the border need, though, is some assurance from this Department that money will go to this incredibly important use. We are not sure given some of the problems in the organization of this new Department that people are looking at the border and will think about it. We need some accountability that the money will go into that program.

We now have 42,000 motorists using SENTRI. As I said, there are three or four times that who are waiting to participate. The backlog is over 6 months. There is no assurance that that backlog will decrease unless there is some dedication of funds to this program.

I know that there is on the part of the committee a rightful concern with, "earmarks." I just ask that the chairman think about accountability not only in the Department but for the stakeholders at the border. We have people on both sides of the border, people who are doing legal business that are so important to our economies. Mexico is now our largest trading partner. A big part of that trade goes on trucks through California, the other part through Texas. We need to move that quickly with security guaranteed.

That is what my amendment will do. The folks who are doing this at the border need to know that the money is going to be there. They need to know that their business can be carried on. They need to know that they can expand their business because they know

that crossing the border will be enhanced in a positive fashion. I say to the gentleman from Kentucky and the gentleman from Minnesota, I know that there is some reluctance to specify programs in their bill. I would just hope that such an amendment with such ramifications for our whole economy, and not just in Texas and New Mexico and Arizona and California where the border crossings are, but in Kentucky where there are people waiting for just on-time delivery. They need to know that SENTRI is working. I would ask for approval of \$5 million for the SENTRI program.

I just would like to point out in furtherance of both our arguments and before the gentleman from Texas speaks, that there may be a rather slow hiring at the Department and thus carryover funding may be more than anticipated. With this really small amount of money from that account, it should not influence in a negative fashion anything about the hiring for this Homeland Security Department. I would again reinforce what she was saying, that the money is there, it is just a question of saying that it is going to be available and thus everybody at the border knows what is going on and we will have a more efficient border.