

**TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE SILVESTRE REYES (TX-16)**  
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**BEFORE THE**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER, MARITIME**  
**AND GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM**  
**MAY 22, 2008**

I would like to begin by thanking Chairwoman Loretta Sanchez and Ranking Member Mark Souder for holding this very important hearing today.

Before coming to Congress, I served for 26 ½ years in the U.S. Border Patrol. Half of that time I was a Border Patrol Sector Chief, first in McAllen, then in El Paso. As the only Member of Congress with a background in border enforcement, I have first-hand knowledge of what we need to do in order to secure our nation's borders and protect the American people.

During my tenure with the INS, I spent four years at the El Paso international bridges where I helped facilitate the free flow of trade into our country. Security for our country does not just mean curtailing illegal immigration. But allowing the flow of trade critical to both border communities and our national economy is vital to the security of our country as well.

I want to commend the Committee on Homeland Security for recognizing this need to ensure the economic security of our nation is taken into account when we work to secure our nation's borders. At the beginning of the year, the Chairman Thompson held a field hearing in my district of El Paso, Texas to examine the challenges facing our nation's land ports of entry.

After participating in many meetings with border residents and listening to the testimony at the hearing, I crafted H.R. 5662, the Putting Our Resources Towards Security Act, or for short, the PORTS Act. The bill would increase the number of Customs and Border Protection Officers by 5,000 over the next five years. But the bill does not just stop there.

It also takes into account the need for support personnel positions which are often overlooked, as well as increases in agricultural specialists who ensure that our nation's food supply coming from outside the United States meets the national standards.

The PORTS Act would provide a thirty percent increase in the number of Customs and Border Protection Officers across the nation. In discussions with Customs and Border Protection, the increase will be sufficient to fully staff all ports of entry – land, sea and airports. This would ensure that officers will not be pulled from one station in order to service another category of port experiencing insufficient staffing levels.

The bill also authorizes \$5 billion in funding for the General Services Administration to allow for reconstruction and repair of the nation's land ports of entry.

We must look at the current state of our nation's ports of entry and commit to properly fund, in terms of staffing and infrastructure, our ports in order to provide security for our nation. Being understaffed and underfunded is unacceptable.

The current Administration has focused their efforts on the areas between ports of entry and have shied away from providing needed resources to support efficient legal crossing at our nation's international bridges.

Don't get me wrong, as a former Border Patrol agent, I know firsthand the need for added resources and additional agents. However, I firmly believe the border must be seen in its totality and not focus on a single area. Every single mile of the Northern and Southern border needs the proper attention in order to secure our homeland. We need a holistic approach to border security.

While we have been pumping millions of dollars into technology that is supposed to be protecting our nation's security between the ports of entry, a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report showed during fiscal year 2006, Customs and Border Protection

officers failed to stop ten percent of illegal immigrants, drugs and weapons violators from entering the United States through airports and land border crossings.

While I strongly believe we need a proper balance between agents on the ground, technology at our borders, and tactical infrastructure, we cannot forget all the agencies securing the border along with Border Patrol. The GAO report speaks to this exact point. Our nation's international bridges have been neglected, causing bridge wait times to swell up to three hours.

Beyond the strain those wait times put on our economy and border residents, ports of entry which are inadequate and understaffed put our national security at risk.

Thank you for allowing me to address your committee about the need for the provisions in the PORTS Act. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.