



Testimony of

**John S. Beutlich, Director, Northern Region
Office of Air and Marine
U.S. Customs and Border Protection**

Before

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Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and
Communications**

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Chairman Bilirakis, Representative Clarke, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is a privilege and an honor to appear before you today to discuss the work of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), particularly the tremendous dedication of our men and women in the field, both at and between our ports of entry (POE). Integral to these efforts is the cooperation with our Canadian partners, state, local and tribal agencies, and the other elements of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to Congress for its continued support of the mission and people of CBP. We greatly appreciate your efforts and assistance, and I look forward to continuing to work with you on these issues in the future.

As America's frontline border agency, CBP is responsible for securing America's borders against threats, while facilitating legitimate travel and trade. To do this, CBP has deployed a multi-layered, risk-based approach to enhance the security of our borders while facilitating the lawful flow of people and goods entering the United States. This layered approach to security reduces our reliance on any single point or program that could be compromised and includes close coordination with DHS partner agencies, with other U.S. interagency partners, and with our Canadian counterparts. Close coordination with our partners ensures our zone of security extends outward and that our physical border is not the first or last line of defense, but rather is one of many layers.

Northern Border Environment and Challenges

There are a number of ways in which the northern border is operationally distinct from other environments. The international boundary with Canada extends over 5,500 miles across both land and water (including the border of Alaska), and it is often described as the longest common non-militarized border between any two countries. It delineates two friendly nations with a long history of social, cultural, and economic ties that have contributed to a high volume of cross-border trade and travel, amounting to more than a billion dollars a day. The border is a diverse region consisting of major metropolitan

centers, integrated bi-national communities, numerous transit hubs, and vast regions with little or no population. Thickly forested, mountainous areas with recreational trail networks provide avenues and cover for those seeking to cross the border illegally. The extensive commercial and transportation infrastructure along the border also provides avenues vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers and smugglers, including vehicular transportation, commercial trucking, and commercial and non-commercial air, rail, and maritime modes of transportation.

The Great Lakes region consists of several large bodies of open water, including the Great Lakes themselves, and rivers along the border. The lakes are heavily used by boaters in the summer and ice fisherman and snowmobiles in the winter, and present unique border enforcement challenges, as small vessels can potentially be exploited for illicit purposes. Seasonal changes affect the ease with which the northern border can be crossed; in general, winter allows the Border Patrol to focus on fewer points of egress than the summer, when much more of the border becomes passable.

In the winter, sub-zero temperatures and significant snowfall provide a natural barrier along some portions of the border. While pedestrian and vehicle traffic are reduced during the winter, unlawful entries between the POEs utilizing snowmobiles are not unusual. When frozen, some rivers, lakes, and streams become easier for smugglers and others to utilize for crossing the border on foot, or by snowmobiles or other modes of transport, while other areas become treacherous with ice floes and are less traversable. The spring thaw can cause impassibly deep mud on some logging roads, thereby closing them to commercial truck traffic, and there tends to be an increase in unlawful cross-border activities *via* all-terrain vehicles.

Northern Border Partnerships

At CBP, we recognize the importance of partnerships, intelligence, and information sharing to the success of our mission, and as such, we are engaged in several national initiatives to increase security on the northern border. Our officers and agents provide

support to the Integrated Border Enforcement Teams (IBET), comprised of U.S. and Canadian federal, state/provincial and local law enforcement personnel, and encompassing 15 regions along the northern border. The IBET concept was formalized in December 2001 with five core agencies: CBP, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA). IBETs operate as intelligence-driven enforcement teams designed to increase information and intelligence-sharing capabilities among the appropriate U.S. and Canadian authorities. By incorporating integrated mobile response capability (*e.g.*, air, land, and marine), the IBETs provide participating law enforcement agencies with a force multiplier that maximizes border enforcement efforts. Within the Detroit Sector, IBET cases have resulted in multiple arrests, most prominently in the Detroit Station area of responsibility, reflecting an increased level of direct coordination between the Stations and our Canadian partners at the tactical level. Our personnel additionally provide manpower to Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST) units, multi-agency teams which collaborate to identify, disrupt and dismantle criminal organizations which pose significant threats to border security.

In August of this year, CBP participated in a Coast Guard-led, full-scale exercise designed to test first responders to a simulated mass rescue operation, a transportation security incident, and a major oil spill on the Detroit River between Michigan and Ontario, Canada. The two-day exercise focused on notification, response, public affairs, and recovery operations within a unified command structure involving multiple jurisdictional/multi-national agencies. The participants included CBP, USCG, ICE, Transportation Security Administration, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Michigan State Police, the Michigan National Guard, the Detroit Police Department, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office, the Macomb County Sheriff's Office, CBSA, and the Windsor (Ontario) Police Department. This type of partnership effort continues to build upon an already forged relationship among our law enforcement partners and the Detroit area border community and has helped to strengthen our ability to respond to unexpected emergencies while maintaining border security.

Additionally, CBP, in conjunction with CBSA and RCMP, completed a Joint Border Threat and Risk Assessment, which provides U.S. and Canadian policymakers, resource planners, and other law-enforcement officials with a strategic overview of significant threats along the border between the United States and Canada. The threat assessment encompasses a range of national security issues, including cross-border criminal organizations, drug trafficking and illegal immigration, the illicit movement of prohibited or controlled goods, agricultural hazards, and the spread of infectious diseases. The assessment also further highlights the commitment of the two countries to identify and mitigate potential threats along our shared border, where there is a potential of terrorism and transnational organized crime.

CBP Resources on the Northern Border

Along the U.S. northern border, CBP processes more than 70 million international travelers and 35 million vehicles each year. Since the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) in June 2009, WHTI compliance along the northern border is at approximately 99 percent, allowing CBP to facilitate travel and focus on individuals who may pose a threat to national security. In addition, CBP annually makes approximately 6,000 arrests and interdicts approximately 40,000 pounds of illegal drugs at and between the POEs along the northern border. Although CBP typically defines the northern border region as the area between the United States and Canada, running from Washington through Maine and including the Great Lakes region, CBP also facilitates and ensures the security of travel and trade across the Alaska-Canadian border. On the northern border, CBP has 120 land border crossings and 17 ferry land crossings, eight Border Patrol Sectors, eight Air and Marine Branches, nine Coastal Marine Units and 23 Riverine Marine Units to protect against the illegal flow of people and goods at and between the official POEs.

Over the past two years, DHS has dedicated historic levels of personnel, infrastructure, and technology to the northern border. Since 9/11, Border Patrol agent staffing on the northern border has increased by over 650 percent – from approximately 340 agents in

2001, to more than 2,200 agents today. At the POEs along the northern border, CBP's Office of Field Operations (OFO) has deployed more than 3,800 CBP Officers and Agriculture Specialists. We have developed and implemented a comprehensive training curriculum for these Officers and Agriculture Specialists, which includes comprehensive, advanced, on-the-job and cross-training courses, as well as routinely offering our frontline officers opportunities to further hone their skills through professional development training.

CBP's Office of Air and Marine (OAM) has 158 Air and 121 Marine Interdiction agents deployed along the northern border. Since 2004, CBP has opened five strategically located Air Branches along the northern border in Washington, Michigan, Montana, New York and North Dakota. In the maritime environment, since 2009, OAM has opened six new marine units on the northern border in New York, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Washington. Currently, CBP operates 29 coastal and 52 riverine vessels on the northern border. CBP has stationed 54 fixed-wing and rotary aircraft on the northern border, including two Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) operating out of the Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota.

With the cooperation of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), CBP expanded its operational airspace along the northern border in January of this year, allowing CBP UAS operations from the Lake-of-the-Woods region in Minnesota to the vicinity of Spokane, Washington, a distance of approximately 950 miles. UAS flight operations contribute significantly to situational awareness in areas that are difficult to reach by other operational elements, a critical capability in difficult terrain along the northern border.

As part of a multi-layered approach to secure America's borders, CBP has also greatly improved our technological capabilities on the northern border. CBP has deployed two mobile surveillance systems (MSS) to provide added radar and camera coverage in the Spokane and Detroit Sectors, and installed additional remote video surveillance systems (RVSS) in the Detroit and Buffalo Sectors, among other technologies.

CBP has also established the Operational Integration Center (OIC) located at Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Harrison Township, Michigan. The OIC is a demonstration project, involving the application of personnel and technology to enhance border security and situational awareness for CBP and its mission partners in the Detroit region, a critical area of the northern border. In terms of personnel, the OIC allows for a collaborative work area and communications capabilities for all components of CBP, USCG, other DHS organizations, federal law enforcement agencies, state and local law enforcement, the RCMP and CBSA.

The OIC brings together information feeds, including radar and camera feeds, blue force tracking, database query from databases not previously available to CBP, remote sensor inputs, RVSS and MSS feeds, and video from various POEs and tunnels. Additional information feeds such as local traffic cameras will be added in the near future. This level of personnel and technology integration serves as a model for collaboration and technology deployments in other areas of the northern border.

In 2005, CBP created a robust information sharing environment known as “BigPipe,” which links equipped CBP aviation assets and information sharing protocols to federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement and public safety agencies to provide near-real time video and sensor data—enhancing situational awareness for officers and rescue personnel across the public safety community. BigPipe is also used by numerous federal, state, local and tribal agencies during warrant presentations, controlled deliveries, search and rescue and surveillance operations. Earlier this year, live video information streamed via Big Pipe was used to enable FEMA Rapid Needs Analysis (RNA) teams to quickly determine the condition of levees during the flooding that occurred in the Mississippi River Valley.

Additionally, Processing, Exploitation, and Dissemination cells have been established at the Air and Marine facilities in Riverside, California, and Grand Forks, North Dakota, to provide essential information to law enforcement across the nation—increasing our understanding of evolving threats and providing the foundation for law enforcement

entities to exercise targeted enforcement in the areas of greatest risk. This intelligence-driven approach prioritizes emerging threats, vulnerabilities and risks, greatly enhancing our border security efforts.

Chairman Bilirakis, Representative Clarke, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify about the work of U.S. Customs and Border Protection and our efforts in securing our borders. I look forward to answering your questions at this time.