

Statement of

# The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator  
Vermont  
April 28, 2005

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Joint Subcommittee Hearing  
"Strengthening Border Security Between the Ports of Entry: The Use of Technology to Protect the Borders"  
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Today marks the third joint hearing of the subcommittees on immigration and terrorism this year. In fact, the immigration subcommittee has yet to hold a hearing on its own. Although I think collaboration is commendable, I do wonder when we will begin the process of reviewing our immigration laws more generally and considering proposals for immigration reform. When a number of Senators sought to offer immigration amendments to the supplemental appropriations bill during the last two weeks, Senators Cornyn and Kyl urged them to delay on the grounds that they were preparing reform legislation. I know a number of other Senators, including Senators McCain, Kennedy, Hagel, and others, are intensely interested in immigration reform. If we are serious about living up to the Majority Leader's commitment that we will consider immigration reform on the floor this year, we need to get started on that work as soon as possible.

I do not mean to denigrate in any way the importance of protecting our borders. We need to walk and chew gum at the same time in this committee, however, and view immigration more broadly than as simply a question of security. I feel that is especially true when we are focusing on a rather narrowly-defined issue.

Turning to the topic at hand, I do believe it is critical that we develop and deploy top-notch technology between our ports of entry. I have worked in a bipartisan manner to increase the size of our Border Patrol, and I have expressed repeatedly in recent months my disappointment in the Administration's proposal to fund only 210 of the 2,000 new Border Patrol agents authorized by Congress for FY 2006. That being said, however, our Northern Border alone is about 4,000 miles long, and we could not hire enough Border Patrol agents to monitor every mile of that border personally. We will always need to supplement highly-trained law enforcement personnel with security technology. That is why I included a provision in the USA PATRIOT Act to authorize \$100 million for improvements in technology for monitoring the Northern Border. I am curious to hear from our witnesses today where they think we stand and what more needs to be done to secure the safety of our border states and the nation as a whole.