

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
May 17, 2011

Statement Of Senator Leahy,
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing On "Improving Security and Facilitating Commerce
At America's Northern Border and Ports of Entry"
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I thank Senator Schumer for chairing this hearing on Northern Border security, an issue of great importance to the states we represent. I also thank Senator Schumer for offering to accommodate the request of several members of the Committee, and expand the scope of this hearing to also address commerce at the ports of entry. I also thank the President for his statement last week at the southern border about his commitment to comprehensive immigration reform. I look forward to working with him to make that a reality.

Director Bersin, I start by honoring the two Border Patrol Agents who died in the line of duty last week. Eduardo Rojas, Jr., and Hector Clark. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families and with the women and men who serve in Border Patrol and our other law enforcement and national security agencies. Just Sunday we had the annual National Police Officers Memorial. No one should take for granted or even forget the sacrifices made by the agents of Border Patrol.

In Vermont, the issues we will discuss today are all inextricably intertwined. We look to our Canadian neighbors as partners in trade and commerce, and as joint stewards of our shared communities, while both nations strive to ensure that the border is secure.

The Northern Border is a vital link in our national security chain. It is very challenging to guard and protect the longest, non-militarized border in the world. Those who want to do us harm will look for openings in gaps like the mountain wilderness of New England, the vast Great Lakes, and the rural plains of the Midwest.

Before September 11, 2001, the Northern Border had been chronically understaffed and neglected. Since then, Congress has allocated considerable resources to increase staffing, purchase updated equipment and vehicles, build new stations, and deploy technology that can help detect illegal entry. A recent GAO report on Northern Border security shows that more can be done, especially in deploying technology, and developing partnerships with local and state law enforcement officials who can help mitigate the vulnerabilities.

I previously raised concerns with the Secretary of Homeland Security, because Customs and Border Protection (CBP) staffing in Vermont has dipped considerably in recent years, in part because resources were shifted to the Southern Border. In addition to security concerns, I worry

that insufficient staffing levels will cause excessive delays at the ports of entry once the summer tourism season kicks off in a few weeks.

The ties between Canada and Vermont run deeper than trade and commerce, and they are based on much more than tourism. Many Vermont families have members on both sides of the border. And some towns, like Derby Line, spread across the international line. We must ensure that border points of entry are modern and secure, and that they serve the needs of these communities. I want to thank Commissioner Bersin for working with me so constructively to try to resolve the issues surrounding the port at Morses Line.

Finally, I would like to discuss the restoration of Amtrak rail service between Vermont and Montreal, Quebec. I understand that one of the obstacles to reestablishing this critical transportation link is determining the appropriate level of CBP screening. I know it can be done, though, as Senator Schumer has two cross-border trains in New York State and there is another one operating in Washington State. I hope that CBP will work with me, the Governor of Vermont, Amtrak, and the Canadians to find a reasonable solution to the passenger screening issue. And because CBP is such a key player in these discussions, I encourage the agency to send an operations and infrastructure official to represent CBP at a cross-border transportation conference in Burlington, Vermont, next week.

I thank Director Morton and Commissioner Bersin for appearing today and look forward to our discussion.

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