Closing Remarks of CBP Commissioner
Robert C. Bonner: Native American Border Security Conference
Ronald Reagan Building

Introduction

(10/08/2002)

It's been a great conference. When I spoke yesterday at the beginning of the conference, I said I wanted us to have a dialogue. I wanted us to share what we've been doing - and to share ideas about how we could improve our cooperation in protecting and securing our borders.

And we've done that.

Yesterday, you heard presentations on the IBET (task force) and CPO models. Today, we had very productive breakout sessions on those concepts. During those sessions, we received valuable input from you on both approaches. The success of our IBET/task force approach was reinforced.

I know that some of you prefer the task force approach - you prefer it as a significant force multiplier that gives an important degree of control to Native American communities. And we hear you.

Yesterday, you heard information about obtaining homeland security grants from DHS - and about other DHS funding mechanisms that could be useful. I want to tell you that we hear you on this issue as well. And we will continue to fight for directly distributing funds to tribal governments, and, in the meantime, work with you to get grants through the states.

Today, we spent the morning talking about certain things that are working in different areas of the country - in the Tuscon Sector / on the Tohono O'Odham Nation, and in the Swanton Sector / on the St. Regis Mohawk Nation. I am impressed by what is working in these areas. For example, the cooperation in Swanton and Akwesasne has been great. The drop in deportable aliens in that area is directly due to the help provided by Native American tribes.

Today we also talked about BORTAC training. And, as a direct result of this conference, a security survey will be conducted for the St. Regis/Akwesasne Mohawk by BORTAC.

During this conference, we've seen the need for community outreach - attending community meetings, starting dialogues, and getting involved with youth and school programs.

We also have seen and understand the need for clear roles and a comprehensive strategy for homeland defense. As Walt LaMar suggested, we will work with the tribes to achieve those.

From all of the sessions during the conference, we have - and I personally have - a greater understanding of your needs. But please continue to communicate issues and problems to us directly.

As Under Secretary Hutchinson pointed out at lunch yesterday, once we knew there was an issue with communication systems on the Tohono O'odham nation, we were able to get the necessary resources to address the issue.

Another example of successful communication and cooperation, as Chief of Police Richard Saunders told you this morning, was when the Tohono O'odham PD was vocal about what wasn't working on their Nation, the Border Patrol realized they needed more flexibility. And the Tohono O'odham PD's subsequent input made a huge difference in the reduction of crime in the area.

So, let me reiterate, please continue to let us know what your needs are - and how you think we can work better together.

This conference stressed the importance of relationships - establishing new ones, networking, maintaining existing relationships. In addition to CBP's Border Patrol having working relationship with individual tribes, the tribes can and should be using their relationships with each other to better protect America. Exchanges between tribes are great tools.

For example, the joint learning going on between the Tohono O'odham and Akwesasne, where they share successes and failures. And I understand the two tribes are going to be visiting each other's nations to see how IBETs and CPOs work on each other's lands. That's great. And we want to hear your thoughts after the visits.

I think the best way to sum up what has happened over the past two days is that we have talked to each other and we have listened to each other. Jason Owens today mentioned that we are part of a team. That's right. We need each other to ensure successful protection of our borders.

I thank all of you for being here at this conference over the past two days. I thank you for your time and energy. I thank you for your views and for your commitment to partnering with us. I hope that during this...
conference, you have seen that we share that commitment to partnering with you.

As we conclude this second Native American Border Security Conference, I know we each have a better understanding of what we can, and should, and will do to improve our cooperation, and to improve our ability to protect our country.

We each have an even better understanding of the fact that we are all Americans Protecting America! Working together, we can and will make our nation safer!

I found this useful. I hope you did. Let's do it again, and let's keep communications open in the meantime.

Thank you.