

Printer Friendly Version Of:

http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/commissioner/speeches_statements/archives/2003/oct072003.xml

Printed:

Sun Oct 23 2005 20:09:11 GMT-0700 (US Mountain Standard Time)

Remarks of U.S. Customs Commissioner Robert C. Bonner*: Native American Border Security Conference Ronald Reagan Building

Introduction

10/07/2002

Thank you, Chief. [*Chief de la Viña*] I'm delighted to be here with all of you this morning to open the second Native American Border Security Conference.

I want to welcome all of you, especially the leaders and law enforcement officials of the 21 Native American tribes who are here today.

I also want to thank the Border Patrol, and Chief de la Viña in particular, for putting this conference together and for his outstanding work as Chief of the Border Patrol. I am committed to enhancing our cooperation with Native American Tribal leaders and law enforcement, and I can assure you that Chief de la Viña shares that commitment.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection Overview

Although this is the second Native American Border Security Conference, it is the first one hosted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. I'd like to take a few moments and tell you about this new agency within the Department of Homeland Security - this new agency that will be working closely with all of you, not just today and tomorrow at this conference, but in the months and years to come.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection, or "CBP," was established on March 1st of this year, as one of the principal operating agencies of the new Department of Homeland Security - it is the DHS agency responsible for securing our country's borders. To create CBP, most of U.S. Customs merged with the entire Border Patrol and all of the immigration inspectors from the former INS, and the agriculture border inspectors from the Department of Agriculture. That happened just over seven months ago, on March 1st.

And on that date, for the first time in our country's history, all agencies of the United States Government with significant border responsibilities were unified into one agency of our Government; one agency to manage, control, and secure our borders.

Before the reorganization, as you know, our border agencies were fragmented among different agencies in 3 different departments of government. This fragmentation was not just terribly inefficient; it made America more vulnerable to international terrorism.

Now, as one agency, in one department, we will be - and already are - making America safer. We are better equipped to protect America and enforce our Nation's laws at its borders, at all of its ports of entry and official crossing points, as well as between our ports of entry.

CBP's Priority Mission

The priority mission of U.S. Customs and Border Protection is homeland security. And for the border agency of our country, that means our priority mission is preventing terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering our country. This is the priority mission of all of CBP, including CBP's Office of the Border Patrol.

It's been just over two years since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, but the terrorist threat is real and ongoing. And, unfortunately, this is a threat that will be with us for many years to come. September 11

10

made clear that our national security - that the security of our Homeland - is dependent upon security at our borders. The two are inextricably linked.

CBP's Traditional Missions

Although our priority mission is antiterrorism, U.S. Customs and Border Protection carries out the traditional missions of its predecessor agencies, including:

- Interdicting illegal drugs and contraband that are being illegally smuggled across our borders; and
- Apprehending those attempting to enter the United States illegally.

Terrorists and drug smugglers, and other illegal entrants pose a threat to the safety and health and well-being of America and all Americans.

Importance of Partnership in Addressing Threats to Border Areas

The United States has over 300 ports of entry and over 7,000 miles of border with Canada and Mexico.

CBP is succeeding in protecting our ports of entry, our official crossings, against terrorist penetration. But a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. And that's why we protect and must protect our borders between our entry points, even in remote areas. Our "homeland security" is threatened, so long as any part of our border is unprotected. We must close the gaps.

To be successful in carrying out both our priority and traditional missions at and near the borders, we must partner with state, local, and tribal authorities. Partnership with Native American authorities is critical to CBP's mission. I know that! And you know that!

24 Native American tribes have a border nexus - 24 tribes govern lands that are either adjacent to borders or directly accessible by boat from the border. These tribal lands cover over 260 miles of the U.S. borders with Mexico and Canada. That distance is 100 miles longer than California's entire border with Mexico.

The Blackfoot Nation shares 63 miles of border with Canada; the Tohono O'odham Nation shares a 75-mile boundary with Mexico. These and other border areas between our official ports of entry are important to our national security. These are areas through which those wishing to enter our country illegally could attempt to cross, and - make no mistake - that does not just include illegal migrants and smugglers of drugs and contraband. It potentially includes international terrorists. Even, potentially, terrorists bringing with them weapons of mass destruction - chemical, biological, or even radiological weapons.

And, as all of you know, illegal cross-border traffic poses other threats as well.

- Threats of crime on tribal lands.
- Threats of environmental degradation on Native American lands.
- Threats of lack of respect for sacred or protected areas on Native American lands.
- Threats to the quality of life for tribal communities.

Tribal law enforcement faces challenges in protecting Native American lands. There are resource challenges, infrastructure challenges, jurisdictional challenges, among others.

Safeguarding our borders and controlling illegal traffic in people and drugs is a responsibility of the federal government. It is a responsibility of the Department of Homeland Security, and within the Department, CBP and its Office of the Border Patrol. But, we cannot do it alone. To effectively address these challenges, we need to continue to work together, and to find better ways to work cooperatively together.

We are all Americans, and all of us must help in protecting America. This is true all along the international borders, and it is most certainly true in the Native American lands near and adjacent to the

international borders with Canada and Mexico. By working together, we will be better able to address the national security and other threats that loom in our border areas.

The theme of this conference says it all: "All Americans Protecting America!" By uniting for our common goals, we can achieve more success than when we pursue those goals separately. Together, we can form a stronger chain. We can form a stronger law enforcement partnership.

CBP's Border Patrol

For many years, Native American law enforcement personnel have worked with the Border Patrol - long before the Border Patrol became part of U.S. Customs and Border Protection - to better protect and secure the border areas between our ports of entry that are within Indian lands. For years, Border Patrol agents and Native Americans have forged relationships based on trust, respect, and commitment to a common mission. We must build on these efforts.

Within U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the Border Patrol retains its responsibility for securing and protecting external boundaries of the United States, between ports of entry. It retains its responsibility for detecting, interdicting, and apprehending illegal drugs, other contraband, undocumented aliens, smugglers, and violators of federal law.

And let me say that the Border Patrol will continue its strong relationships with tribal law enforcement. As Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, I am committed to seeing that those relationships become even stronger.

Progress Since the Inaugural Conference

We will build on the successes of the inaugural Native American Border Security Conference in January 2002, and the good work that's been done since then. At the inaugural conference, we set objectives of strengthening working relationships and cooperation between the Border Patrol and Native American law enforcement personnel. I'm impressed with what has been done since January 2002.

- Since then, the Border Patrol has established liaisons at each Sector and at Headquarters for Native American law enforcement issues.
- The Border Patrol has shared technology and equipment with tribal police.
- The Border Patrol has provided training to Native American law enforcement and has also received training from Native American law enforcement.
- The Border Patrol and Native American law enforcement personnel have conducted joint law enforcement operations together and have shared intelligence.
- They have worked side by side - truly embodying the idea of all Americans protecting America.
- Tribal law enforcement officers have participated in Integrated Border Enforcement Team (IBET) operations.
- Tribal law enforcement officers have assisted us with apprehending smugglers, by providing specific intelligence reports. They even helped uncover a fraudulent document scheme used by non-Native Americans to enter the United States illegally.
- Several tribes have established Explorer programs on Native American lands. They have established procedures to address local concerns and complaints, and have expressed an interest in developing new enforcement strategies to protect and secure our Nation.

These achievements represent significant progress. But I think - I know - that working together we can do more.

Objectives for This Conference

- At this conference, we will assess the progress of the last 1½ years, and identify specific areas where our efforts should be strengthened, and ways we can overcome security vulnerabilities.
- We will discuss specific tribal needs, and determine where we can partner to provide the training

and equipment that will be most useful to you.

- We will look at ways to enhance communication, and at possibilities for greater intelligence and information sharing.
- We will look at the many jurisdictional issues tribes are facing, and talk about how to address them.
- We will talk about recruiting Native Americans for CBP's ranks. As you know, we have Border Patrol agents who are enrolled Native Americans, and we want to continue to reach out to tribal communities to encourage careers in federal law enforcement.
- On a practical note, we will spend time talking about the process for tribal authority requests for homeland security grants from DHS. This afternoon Cheri Roe, Director of Tribal Government Coordination for DHS will be here to talk to you and answer your questions about this.
- What is most important for this conference, however, is that we hear your ideas on how CBP, DHS, and the Federal Government can do more to support your law enforcement efforts on tribal lands along the border.

CPO Model

At this conference, we want to develop ways to work together to improve border security. We have some ideas, but we want your ideas and your feedback on our ideas. In short, we want a dialogue.

One thing we are looking at is the possibility of expanding our CPO program. As many of you know, for years, U.S. Customs has had a unique unit of Native American federal law enforcement officers, called Customs Patrol Officers, or "CPOs." This CPO unit is part of Customs and Border Protection, and it is under the administrative and operational oversight of the Border Patrol.

The CPOs operate on the Tohono O'odham Nation in Arizona, with their efforts focused on drug interdiction. Their unique skills have been put to good use, and they have been extremely successful. In fact, you will hear a presentation from the Native American CPOs later today.

I want you to think about the CPO concept, because during this conference, we want to hear from you about whether you think this model - Native Americans working as Federal law enforcement officers to help protect and secure the border - is one that should be expanded to other Native American Nations, to other areas along the border.

Task Force Model

Another idea I want you to think about - and give us your views on while you're here - is the use of task forces. As I've indicated, I strongly believe in the force multiplying potential of working together in partnership to secure our border.

Operational partnership through task forces enables us to combine resources of the Federal government with state, local, and tribal authorities to tackle our shared enforcement challenges.

Through task forces, we can share information and resources, provide equipment and training, and work together to secure border areas. As many of you know, something akin to task forces is in place in many areas of the Northern Border through the Integrated Border Enforcement Team (IBET) concept. You'll hear a presentation on IBETs this morning.

I believe we should consider using a task force concept in partnership with you. But I want to hear your thoughts on whether we should use a task force model, and if so, how you think that could be done most effectively from your perspective.

No One-Size-Fits-All Solution

The CPO Model and the Task Force Model are just two possible approaches that could strengthen our relationship and cooperation. As we exchange ideas, we recognize that there may not be a one-size-fits-all approach.

Native Americans are not a single group with the same law enforcement issues and concerns. Each tribe has its own unique government; each tribe and each tribe's law enforcement entities face challenges that differ from one another. It is important that we recognize those individual differences as we work to establish cohesive relationships.

CBP is open and committed to pursuing a variety of partnerships that advance our mutual goal of increasing security.

Conclusion

Let me wrap up my remarks this morning by again saying to all of you, welcome! I know we will all emerge from this conference with fresh ideas - and with the energy, dedication, and plans to implement those ideas. We will emerge with an even more unified commitment to protecting America!

I know that the Border Patrol, working with other federal law enforcement, and especially working with tribal law enforcement authorities, can and will make America's borders safer and more secure.

Thank you.

see also:



on cbp.gov:

Speeches and Statements

Messages