

**TESTIMONY BY REPRESENTATIVE SILVESTRE REYES (TX-16),
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP, REFUGEES, BORDER
SECURITY, AND INTERNATIONAL LAW
NOVEMBER 8, 2007**

I would like to begin by thanking Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren and Ranking Member Steve King for holding this very important hearing today. Special thanks to my fellow Texan, Representative Sheila Jackson-Lee, for inviting me to testify on an issue very familiar to me.

As most of you know, before coming to Congress, I served for 26 ½ years in the U.S. Border Patrol where I began as an agent and was fortunate enough to be chief in two different locations for the last thirteen of those years. As the only Member of Congress with a background in border enforcement, I have first-hand knowledge of what we need to do in order to reduce illegal immigration while keeping our borders and the nation safe.

During my tenure, I not only oversaw long stretches of terrain between the ports of entry, but for four years, I also worked at the international bridges. I have a broad understanding of what it takes in order to secure the many components our nation's borders.

Madame Chairwoman, I applaud your efforts to keep comprehensive immigration reform at the forefront of discussion. I have always said that we need a comprehensive immigration reform plan with three main components: strengthened border security; earned legalization for those who qualify; and a guest worker program with tough employer sanctions. Comprehensive reform is like a three-legged stool. Without one leg, the stool topples.

Our nation's current immigration system is broken and is in desperate need of repair. For the past few years, Congress and the Administration have been very concerned with cracking down on illegal immigration and have focused much of their energy on security-only legislation. While I certainly agree that we need to focus on assuring everyone enters our country legally, we must also remember not to put all of our attention and resources on one particular agency or leg of the stool.

While I do not have enough time to talk to each leg of the stool, I would like to comment on the border security aspect which is very prominent in my district of El Paso, Texas. While the number of United States Border Patrol agents has risen dramatically, the other agencies that assist in the security effort have been neglected. When the average person thinks about the men and women overseeing our nation's borders the first group that comes to mind is the men and women in green. People often forget about the men and women in blue, the Customs and Border Protection Officers (CBOs), those who, for

instance in my district, saw more than 28.5 million individuals traveling by car over this past fiscal year alone.

Our international bridges are suffering because attention has not been placed on them. Over the last several months, constituents in my district and across the nation have faced increased wait times, and recent reports state that times have escalated upwards from two to three hours. This problem must be stopped and help must be directed in order to keep security high while allowing for the free flow of trade and commerce.

I would like to take a moment and talk specifically to a section in Ms. Jackson-Lee's bill, H.R. 750, the Save America Comprehensive Immigration Act. Section 639 would increase the number of inspectors at our air and land ports of entry. While 1,000 additional officers is an increase, we need to do more. In El Paso alone, four international bridges are in need of a total of more than 150 Custom and Border Protection Officers. We must look at the current state of our nation's ports of entry and commit to properly funding staffing levels adequate enough to provide security for our nation. Being understaffed and underfunded is unacceptable.

We must also remember all the agencies securing the border along with Border Patrol. We must increase the number of United States Attorneys, Immigration and Customs Enforcement inspectors, immigration judges, federal judges, U.S. Marshals, as well as Bureau of Prison personnel.

Immigration reform must continue to move forward, and we must take a holistic approach to ensure we encompass all relevant agencies. I appreciate the opportunity to testify this morning, and I look forward to working on this important mission together. Thank you for giving me time to testify, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.