

**Printer Friendly Version Of:**

[http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/highlights/sw\\_border\\_sec.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/highlights/sw_border_sec.xml)

**Printed:**

Fri Aug 5 10:30:55 EDT 2011

## Commissioner Addresses Past, Present, Future of Southwest Border Security

08/04/2011

Looking past present-day controversies, Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Alan D. Bersin today discussed several principles central to the evolution of current border security at an event sponsored by the Center for American Progress in Washington, D.C.

*click for hi-res*



Commissioner Bersin, right, speaks to audience concerns, with Doris Meissner, senior fellow and director, U.S. Immigration Policy Program, and Marshall Fitz, director of Immigration Policy at Center For American Progress.

The panel dialogue on the State of U.S./Mexico Border Security featured Bersin and former Immigration and Naturalization Service Commissioner Doris Meissner placing today's border situation in historical perspective.

Bersin pointed to gains in technology and infrastructure, which in addition to hardening the border have given the Border Patrol ever-improving capabilities to track illegal border crossers—an important, but often overlooked, development.

Today the Border Patrol can assess the crossing history of every person apprehended. "They can tell you how many times that person has been arrested, where that person has been arrested, and what consequences have been applied to that person," Bersin told the panel audience. "This ability to collect and analyze data permits us to apply consequences that we could not in the past."

In Arizona, for example, except for apprehensions of children and other humanitarian cases, "Nine out of 10 people who have been arrested are actually receiving a consequence," said Bersin. Some are prosecuted, some are transported away from the border, some are flown back by the Mexican government, but "no more voluntary returns," said the commissioner, adding the Spanish translation, "No mas."

Bersin also credited the unprecedented communication between Mexico and the U.S. with improving border security. The U.S. has "gained the cooperation of Mexican authorities in ways that would have been unthinkable a decade ago," including a shared responsibility and collaboration on law enforcement efforts.

In addressing an audience member's question on shutting the border to illegal immigration and contraband, Bersin was practical. "Sealing the border is theoretically possible," he said, "but I think there are very few Americans who would be willing to pay the costs involved," including the hiring of many thousands of more Border Patrol agents.

Bersin cautioned against playing into the "volatility" of border politics, noting that "any particular incident gets blown into this conflagration." Instead the panel suggested focusing on what is being achieved each day along the U.S.-Mexico border.

—*Susan Holliday*  
*Office of Public Affairs*