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More Ideas and Initiatives for Better, Faster, and Cheaper Border Security

The Honorable Mike Rogers

I'm glad to be back with you to talk about a subject I talked about with you last year: border security, what we are and are not doing, and what we need to be doing. Let me frame it: What I'd like to do is talk a little about the global problem in our current circumstance, what has and has not happened, and then some legislation I've introduced and am going to introduce that I think will deal with it.

The Priority of Border Enforcement

As you know, we have a very porous southern border and northern border, and not a lot has been done to remedy that but talk about it. I fault the Bush Administration, which I'm very supportive of as a general rule, but when it comes to border security, the President has more of an open borders perspective than I do—and than I think most of the nation does. One of the surprises I've seen over the last couple of years is that, not only in my district, but among my colleagues around the country, this is *the* dominant issue. It has been becoming the dominant issue, but it is now *the* dominant issue in my congressional district, not the war. People in Alabama generally are very supportive of what we're doing over in Iraq and Afghanistan from a defense standpoint, but people have a palpable anger about the fact that this country is not doing more, in a very real way, to secure the borders, and they expect something to be done.

I'm hearing from my colleagues that they're seeing the same things back home—very similar to what happened with the drug issue, Medicare Part D. Before that initiative came about, there was a growing

Talking Points

- It costs less to send somebody through Harvard University for four years than it does to send a Border Patrol agent through training. We must focus on cost-effective training at multiple locations and on retention of these valuable assets.
- Additionally, we should allow Customs and Border Protection to contract with universities and community colleges and other entities for agent training.
- Homeland security canine detection units are very inexpensive, very efficient, and very effective tools, but we are grossly underutilizing them. Most of these canines are bred in Europe. We should invest in growing and training those breed lines domestically.
- We must also have a report on the medical costs for illegal aliens that federal, state, and local governments have to absorb—because most of them are just absorbing costs.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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groundswell of demand in the country that we do something about it, and that's when it finally happened. I'm encouraged that this growing anger is going to manifest itself in electoral changes that will cause this Congress and the next Administration to do something about the borders.

In my business, what I found is that the Border Patrol agents we have are very well trained, very professional, and very understaffed. I went down to the southern border not expecting to find high-caliber Border Patrol agents. I don't know why I had that bias, but I did. But they are first-quality professionals. The problem is, when I started going down there three years ago, they had roughly 12,000 Border Patrol agents. The Administration says they need 18,300. I personally think they're probably going to need 21,000, 22,000, or 23,000 if we really want to secure the borders—until such time as we get some fencing that's adequate.

The Cost of Border Enforcement

To further exacerbate that problem, Customs and Border Protection (CPB) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are telling Congress it costs $187,000 to train a new agent and get him in the field. That's for a five-month training program. For the actual training program that the Federal Law Enforcement and Training Center (FLETC) provides, FLETC charges only $12,000 of that $187,000. Then there's the officer's salary for five months; they start off at about $45,000 per year, so that's about $20,000.

There's a big gap in those numbers. It costs less to send somebody through Harvard University for four years, room and board included, than it does to send a Border Patrol agent through that training. So we've been pressuring DHS to get more realistic in their numbers; they've gotten that down now to $156,000. We have private-sector counterparts who say they can provide that officer with the exact same skill-level training for $141,000.

At any rate, these are some astronomical numbers. They inhibit our ability to get more people in the field, because at $187,000—or whatever it is—it becomes cost-prohibitive to put the 10,000 new agents that we really need in the field when you take attrition into consideration. When I was there, we would go to detention facilities and find that not only were we having bad problems with just the "catch and release" practices, but I was astounded to find that when somebody comes across the border and we're debriefing them and about to put them on the bus to take them back, if they have a health problem—let's say my chest is hurting—a Border Patrol agent has to take him to the local hospital or the doctor and stay with him until that problem is treated. If it turns out that knee needs to be replaced, that Border Patrol agent has to stay with him in the hospital for the multiple days that that surgery is being performed, and *we pay for it*.

If it's a back problem, an eye problem, or whatever, we pay for it. But we also pay for that very highly trained Border Patrol agent to stay there 24 hours a day, and I found that nobody could tell me how much we're paying for that. DHS couldn't tell us, the local governments couldn't tell us, nor could the other federal agencies involved. That's really unacceptable; first, that we're paying for it in the absence of a life-threatening condition and second, that nobody can tell us how much it costs. That was a disturbing realization.

Another thing that I've been bothered by is that we have found these canine detection teams are very effective tools in a variety of ways, not only for explosive detection, but for drug detection, cadaver dogs for post-disaster, and at the ports of entry where there are fruits, vegetables, and other products coming across. They're very inexpensive, very efficient, and very effective tools, but we are grossly underutilizing them.

Yet the bigger concern for me is that almost all of the dogs we use in DHS and most of the dogs that we use in the military at these points of entry, egress and ingress, are obtained from foreign sources—from Europe primarily, from Belgium and Germany. We breed and produce very few of the dogs that we use in these very important roles. Even for the ones that we then bring back and train, there is no uniform standard we're applying to that asset so that we can know that it's meeting an acceptable threshold for any use in the field.

Obviously those are flaws that we need to remedy, but also I think we've just got to have more of that asset. Testifying before our committee, Secre-

tary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff has acknowledged that this is a grossly underutilized asset and that he has agreed to help step it up. We put in this year's 9/11 bill that we just passed the authorization and funding for 200 new dogs each year for the next five years. In other legislation we're stepping that up too, for breeding programs and other aspects. I'm going to talk about that legislation in a minute.

Another problem that we found with the Border Patrol agents is that many of them, because they go through this very skilled training, when they finish their training—the young officers in particular—work on the southern border. I found that it's a function of promotion that you get to go to the northern border; there are no junior members of the service at the northern border. After you've put in your 15 years, then you can put in for a place that's not in the middle of the desert.

If any of you have been to the desert in New Mexico, Arizona, or Texas, you know that it is not exactly where you want to raise a young family. What's happening is that these Border Patrol agents are recruited, they get down there, and they find that they're in a very remote place. You can't go to the local Wal-Mart, there's no mall nearby, and kids have a problem finding good schools. So they get hired away by police departments in the western states that pay them much more than we pay. That's a deficiency that we can't allow to continue, especially when we are paying $187,000 to train and supervise them their first couple of years in the field—only to see that asset go to San Diego.

Legislation and Border Security

We're trying to deal with those issues. There are four bills in particular that I want to talk about: one that I introduced last year (and that passed); one I introduced last year that didn't pass; and two that I'm introducing this year. One is the More Border Patrol Agents Now Act, and that deals with the issue I just talked about, this problem of not having enough agents in the field right now.

There is an early retirement requirement in CBP, and a lot of the agents don't want to retire when they reach that threshold age. They're physically able to work. This is a very old rule in that organization. So they're out on retirement, they want to come back, and we have allowed, in this legislation, for these annuitant hires to be brought back in at no financial penalty. These are experienced, seasoned folks who can help supervise this large volume of new trainees that we just put through the academy and that we're putting out in the field. They are a very valuable asset, so this bill allows for that.

It also allows for us to pay attention to recruitment and retention for this reason: According to the Administration, we have to have 9,000 approved applicants that are primed and ready to start the academy to get 6,000 through it and into the field. There's a level of fall-off in the training period. The bigger problem, though, is to get that 9,000. They have to go through 45 applicants to get one. So there's a huge volume of recruitment that has to be done to get people to apply.

What we've got to do is find a way that once we get a person that's a good fit, we're going to pay them well. We're going to pay them a bonus when they finish school. We're going to pay them a bonus for thresholds when they stay in employment. We've asked them to study the compensation levels to find ways that we can make the salary so competitive that it's not appealing for them to go away.

Another thing that we do in the bill, though, is talk about allowing CBP to contract with universities and community colleges and other entities for the training. Right now, all the Border Patrol agents have to go through the CBP training facility at Artesia, New Mexico. It is like running your head into the wall trying to explain to them that this is law enforcement training.

It does not have to happen in this one place. Courses taught there can be taught in another building on another campus; it's not magic that you go through there. But in their world, the only way to really be a true CBP agent is to have that one thing in common, going through that one institution. That would be great if we had the luxury of time, but based on the numbers of agents they've been putting through that facility, it will take us, at best, until 2010 to get the 18,300 agents in the field that the Administration says we need. According to the Administration, if we don't have them by the

end of next year, it's not going to happen at the current pace.

What I've asked them to do is think outside the box. Recognize that for the short term we should let that institution, in concert with FLETC, partner with some universities or law enforcement training facilities for short-term training to push through a large volume of trained people that meet their criteria. They have the curriculum; they have to approve it; they can participate in the teaching of it. But we must push through this larger volume so that we can get more Border Patrol agents out in the field now. We found a way through annuitant hires to provide supervisory training once they're in the field, but we've got to get more people through the pipeline. And it has met with real opposition—and that's from the Secure the Border Now Act, that second thing about trying to get some outside-the-box thinking on training. I've also found that there's opposition from the employee unions. They feel like this is a way to threaten their institutions.

So those are two items that have been introduced last year; one passed the House (the first one), but it didn't pass the Senate. Once it got into the Senate, More Border Patrol Agents Now was focused on retention, recruitment, and bonuses. When it got to the Senate, what we found was some of the law enforcement agencies said, "Well, if we're going to give them retention and recruitment bonuses and look at raising their pay, why can't we do it for other areas of law enforcement?" So it stopped being about dealing with our borders, and it started being about trying to make sure everybody got a bite of the apple, which is just a shame from a national security standpoint.

Canines: Cost-Effective Enforcement

I am introducing a bill to deal with the area that I'm really excited about, and that's the potential for us to really ratchet up our canine assets. It is called the Canine Detection Team Improvement Act, and it will require DHS and other entities that currently train canines to work together. What I found when I toured various facilities like the CBP canine training facility out in Front Royal, Virginia; the Secret Service facility in Beltsville, Maryland; the El Paso CBP training facility; and others, is that these people don't talk to each other, particularly about the breeding components that they have.

The Transportation Security Administration is doing some really exciting stuff out at Lackland Air Force Base, trying to genetically create a dog that has to deal with the unique environment of working on the border, because it's very hot and the pads on their feet have to be toughened. They have to have the ability to work for long periods of time and so on. They're looking at genetically trying to breed a better dog for that.

The same thing is happening at Auburn University. They're working on olfactory capabilities, trying to find a way to enhance them. What they've found is pretty exciting, that you can give a dog some zinc and it dramatically affects its olfactory capability and enhances it—they can smell a larger variety of smells from farther away.

If you've ever seen these dogs work, it's absolutely amazing to watch them go through an airport cargo area sweeping these bins that carry cargo. At a minimum, this is what we ought to be doing. Right now we screen 100 percent of the folks that go on the plane, and we screen your personal bags when they go into cargo, but the rest of the cargo that goes on the plane is not screened. At a minimum, we ought to be buying this $5,000 dog, spending $20,000 to train him, putting him with a trainer, and letting him walk through the cargo areas and sweep those. That's an affordable asset that we could put in every airport.

A Homeland Security Committee team went to Europe, met with the folks at Scotland Yard, and talked with them. They said they use the dogs in transit systems. They'll go into rail stations, and they'll just walk around with the dogs as a deterrent for folks who may be thinking about carrying explosives on the train.

What's interesting over there is they had the same problem we have: Most of their dogs are coming from the same part of the world we're getting ours. Because they have a shortage of these dogs, they'll get some dogs that are just family pets but that look like they might be trained, and they'll put them with a uniformed officer and let them walk through the bus station or the train sta-

tion to make the people think that they know what they're smelling.

Anyway, it's an interesting concept. I would like to see us have more of those assets to use in every bus station, train station, and airport, not only in the cargo areas but also out front. At every large point of entry in California, what you'll find now on the border is 20 or 25 lanes of traffic. We have dogs that can only work for 20- or 25-minute intervals because of the heat and the pavement. They always have a dog working, but it can only randomly work certain lanes. So what's happening is the bad guys over on the Mexican side of the border are spotting where the dog is, and they tell their carriers which lanes to get in so that when these sweeps come, they don't go through a lane that's being swept by a dog. That's not acceptable. We ought to have enough of those assets so that every car that comes through has this sweep take place. This is, again, a very inexpensive but very effective asset.

The thing I was most bothered about with these dogs, though, is not the lack of uniformity of training, which this bill would remedy—there would be a voluntary participation in an organization that would certify your dog, and if it's certified, it can be bought by the federal government. If it's not certified, the federal funds won't go for it.

But the thing that I'm most disturbed about is the breeding program. These European dogs that we're going to get are special, but what I don't understand is why don't we get those breed lines that are so good—particularly the Belgian Malinois? Bring those breed lines back over here and grow them here. There's no reason for us to be going over there. The Department of Defense is getting most of its dogs from over there. When I was in Iraq the last time, I was amazed to see how many contract canine teams we had over there. We don't have our own when we're spending billions on missile systems!

There's a great use for these canine teams. We've got to get some structure to it and some uniformity, and I think this bill would help do that.

Closing Thoughts

The last bill I'm going to introduce is going to deal with that issue I mentioned a little while ago about medical expenses. We need to know how much money these illegal aliens are costing us. This bill would direct the Department of Homeland Security to report by December 15th of each year about how much they're spending with hospitals and others on medical care for people in their custody. Then it would go further and require a study of the costs federal, state, and local governments are having to absorb, because most of them are just absorbing costs. Illegal aliens go to a local hospital—and these are the ones that are not in our custody—and they present themselves for treatment. They get treated, and the hospital eats the cost. I want to collect that information so people can understand the enormity of what this is costing our country economically and what a burden it's putting on these local institutions, not just in health, but in public safety, in public welfare, and in other areas.

—The Honorable Mike Rogers, a Republican, represents the 3rd district of Alabama in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he is a member of the Homeland Security Committee.