Remarks by Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Admiral James Loy at the Border Trade Alliance Annual Conference

Release Date: 02/14/05 00:00:00

Washington, D.C.
Border Trade Alliance Annual Conference
February 14, 2005
(Remarks as Prepared)

Thank you, Eric, for those kind words. The Border Trade Alliance has been one of the Department's strongest partners, offering ideas, energy, solutions and sweat to help us secure our borders while facilitating commerce. Thank you for your vigorous commitment to improving the quality of life in our border communities, and for helping us protect the homeland. We look forward to a long partnership with you.

Here is some of the fruit our partnership with BTA has yielded thus far: You organized and conducted a series of outreach events in Mexico and the U.S. to help the trade community understand US-VISIT. These events had a positive impact and soothed misguided fears among the border trade community.

You participated and led one of the sessions at our recent Cargo Security Summit. And since then, you have taken some of the lessons learned at that Summit and shared them with your members. You helped organize the private sector efforts in support of building a FAST lane in Nogales. You were our most important partner in this achievement – organizing and directing the efforts of the private sector.

It is important to note that many groups come to us eager to comment and advise and tell us what we are doing wrong, or what we could do better. Under the leadership of President Maria Louisa O'Connell, BTA actually rolled up its sleeves to help, raising $1 million in private funds to build that road.

Your commitment, cooperation and excellence provide a wonderful example for everyone, and we are immensely grateful for what you have done. You have offered the type of partnership and cooperation that defines the American spirit. Throughout our history, from the founding of our country and many threats to our freedom, Americans have always come together to protect our home.

We all came together again after the nation was attacked on September 11, 2001. And since that day, we have made our country exponentially more secure, and helped facilitate the flow of goods across our borders.

I will touch briefly and broadly on a few of the Department’s achievements, particularly in border security, since 9-11. I will also talk about current initiatives and how we will make our country safer tomorrow, or as you say in the agenda, "give a peek into the department’s future."

The Border Trade Alliance and the Department of Homeland Security have a common interest regarding our borders: We are each dedicated to protecting them – and our country – by improving the safe, legal and efficient flow of goods and people across our borders. Together with our private sector partners, with our friends in Mexico and Canada, with dedicated state and local officials – and with you – DHS has made much progress toward this shared goal. Here are some of the things we have done to enhance our country’s security and improve the quality of life for our citizens:

- With your help – and together with our partners in Mexico – we created a Border Partnership Action Plan that focuses on protecting our infrastructure and securing the flow of people and goods so vital to our border communities.

- Protecting our borders requires the joint partnership of both government and business. So we established a Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism. The Customs Trade Partnership has been a successful program to expedite the processing of cargo at our borders while ensuring its security. The President’s Fiscal Year 2006 budget allocates $54.3 million to continue and enhance the efforts of this partnership.

- Our Container Security Initiative has strengthened our port and cargo security, pushing our border security outward. Currently there are U.S. Customs inspectors in 34 international ports of trade working alongside our allies to target and screen high-risk cargo before it reaches our shores. The 2006 budget allocates $138.8 million more to this effort. I’ll speak more about the budget in a minute.

- Domestically, we expanded hours of operations at key entry points, such as Otay Mesa, to accommodate local...
Domestically, we expanded hours of operations at key entry points, such as Otay Mesa, to accommodate local travel needs of border residents.

DHS extended the length of time for Border Crossing Card holders to remain in the border area – from 72 hours to 30 days.

We’ve done much to improve the Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (SENTRI) lanes to expedite travel for vehicles that have been through a pre-authorization process. We plan to open seven new SENTRI lanes soon.

We have achieved great progress in facilitating the secure flow of goods by opening seven Free and Secure Trade (FAST) dedicated lanes in the largest ports on the southern border. We plan to add FAST lanes to seven more ports on the U.S.-Mexico border in the coming months, further easing commercial truck traffic while strengthening security.

These new lanes will enhance the economic prosperity as well as the security of both countries. We currently clear 15% of our bilateral trade through these dedicated lanes. We want the percentage to increase significantly in the next year.

Finally, a collaborative US-VISIT Bi-national Working Group has led to the successful implementation of US-VISIT at the top 50 busiest land ports of entry. I know Jim Williams is speaking later today to give an in-depth update on US-VISIT and its integration with SENTRI and FAST. I will let him get into the details.

These are remarkable achievements in such a short period of time – achievements that would not be possible without great partners such as the Border Trade Alliance. Still, we have much work ahead of us – in border security and our overall security. Now, the peek into the future: We have many challenges in front of us – new leadership, transitions and an enemy that will not rest, an enemy that still seeks to destroy our economy, our buildings, our people and our way of life.

As our mission statement calls us to do, the Department of Homeland Security must continue to lead a unified national effort to secure America – to prevent and deter terrorist acts and protect against and respond to all threats against our nation. We will continue to do this with our new leadership because we have created a strong foundation for the Department built upon a common mission, a vision, and a set of core values and strategic goals that will guide them as they take hold of the security baton in their new positions.

Our strategic goals apply to both our overall approach to homeland security and our border and trade security. The goals are consistent with and closely follow the DHS strategies that were laid out by Secretary Ridge more than a year ago. And although we have a set of principles and strategies to guide us, our constant challenge will be as change agents, as embracers of change and as managers in a change-dominated environment. We must adapt, move nimbly and remain flexible, because the terrorists will do the same.

The President’s Fiscal Year 2006 budget shows the President’s commitment to securing our homeland and offers an example of flexibility and adaptability to changing environments, threats and needs. President Bush’s 2006 budget request includes a total of $41.1 billion for the Department of Homeland Security – an increase of seven percent over the FY 2005 budget.

Primarily, the budget is designed to allow us to focus more on the actual threat, the risk attended to that threat and the vulnerabilities associated with that threat. It allows us to be much more surgical in our distribution of dollars. It is also designed around five major themes: Revolutionizing the Borders; Strengthening Law Enforcement; Improving National Preparedness and Response; Leveraging Technology; and Creating a 21st Century Department. The budget helps us to innovate while continuing to integrate and consolidate existing security functions to more effectively serve our overall mission and make America safer. As you know, the coalescence of 22 distinct agencies and bureaus, each with its own employees, mission, and culture, into a single, unified Department has been an extraordinary task, and yet an extraordinary achievement for our country.

Our goal continues to be to make DHS a 21st century Department that will become a standard for how government in the 21st century must work. One of the consolidations the budget proposes involves the various DHS screening activities. The proposal is for a new Office of Screening Coordination and Operations to enhance terrorist-related
screening to detect, identify, track, interact, people and cargo that pose a threat to homeland security. This office enhances our efficiencies, bringing together several similar ongoing screening efforts under one office, cutting overhead costs and duplication.

This, by the way, is an example of the President’s overall commitment in the budget to restrain federal spending and instill fiscal discipline. The President seeks to foster performance results and the ability to measure the results. And these results, specifically in homeland security, but also throughout the budget, seek to keep our country’s economic engine running at peak performance while maintaining our security. All of you at the Border Trade Alliance share that same ideal, because you know that we do not have true freedom unless we have economic and personal freedom as well. And freedom, our way of life, in all its forms, is what we are protecting now. Overall, with this budget, we will continue on with our important work. That includes continuing to be innovative when it comes to border security; law enforcement; improving our national preparedness and response capabilities; leveraging new technologies; and streamlining our own agency.

I have every confidence that we will do so – all of us – as we work toward these common goals together. Just as the Greatest Generation took on and defeated the threats of Nazism and Fascism, and Reagan’s generation won the Cold War, we are taking on efforts to defeat the very real dangers of terrorism. So let us continue to embrace this call to action and seek opportunities to improve our security and economic vitality. Let us embrace the vital responsibility of our generation and of our time.

My thanks to all of you at the Border Trade Alliance. Your work has been invaluable.

Thank you.