

Press Conference with Secretary Michael Chertoff, Chief of the Border Patrol David Aguilar and Acting Director of the Office of Detention and Removal John Torres on the Secure Border Initiative

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Secretary Chertoff: Well, good morning, everybody. I'm here with the Chief of the Border Patrol, David Aguilar, and with John Torres, who is the Acting Director of Detention and Removal Operations at the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Bureau.

As you know, I recently returned from a trip earlier this week with the President down to the Southwest border. And of course, I know you all heard the President speak about what our strategy is moving forward to get control of the border in a reasonable period of time.

One of the things we had the opportunity to do at the border was to talk to and see some of the hard work that's being done by our Border Patrol agents and our ICE agents who are working on the ground every day to secure our borders and to make this country safe.

The President reiterated his commitment at the border to securing our borders, and his commitment to developing solutions to the problems we face regarding immigration. Since taking office, the President has directed an increase in border security funding of 60 percent, and has added resources to hire an additional 1,900 Border Patrol agents. And just a month or so ago, the President signed an appropriations bill that will provide an additional thousand agents, and 2,000 additional beds, which we can use to detain people that we apprehend.

I thought what I would do here is give you a little bit of an overview of what our strategy is and then introduce the Chief and the Director to talk about some of the operational accomplishments and some of our operational milestones. And what we're going to do periodically is come out and talk to you about what we've accomplished, where we're headed, what our measurements are of success, where we still have distance to cover, because I think that the public is interested in seeing that we are taking a very disciplined and measured approach to making sure we get control of the border in real time.

As you know, there are a lot of dimensions to the border. The problem of immigration is one that's been with this country for 20 years. So we are digging ourselves out of a hole which it took 20 years to dig ourselves into. And it's not going to happen overnight, but what will make it work and what makes it achievable is a strategy that blends all of the elements of our power to control our border, and looks at the border as an entire system.

So we begin with the border itself, those that we apprehend coming into the country. There, the critical element is to apprehend and intercept, detain and then remove people so that we have such a high percentage rate of interception and removal that we actually begin to deter people from coming across the border. And we do that using a mix of Border Patrol agents, enhanced boots on the ground, using some low-tech infrastructure like vehicle barriers or fencing like we're putting out east of the San Diego—city of San Diego along the border, and also using some high-tech tools, things like unmanned aerial vehicles, ground sensors, remote-controlled cameras, and even the possible use of satellites as the kinds of tools that will give us a picture on the ground. And as the Chief will explain to you, we change that mix of people, infrastructure and technology, depending on the particular terrain that we have to face. We have to use a common strategy, but the application of the strategy depends upon the particular landscape which is the operational environment. And again, this is part of a disciplined commonsense approach.

Second element of this is interior enforcement. We've got to change the dynamic which brings people into this country to work on an illegal basis. One key to that is to change the dynamic that gets employers to hire those illegal aliens, and that means more vigorous interior enforcement.

But a third piece of it is giving these employers and these employees some legal regulated channel for temporary work that would take some of the pressure off of our Border Patrol and our enforcement agents.

It's a simple matter of logic. If you're trying to dam a river, what you don't do is simply build a high dam, because the water keeps rising and the pressure keeps building. You try to build a channel for the water that's productive and that's regulated, so you can take some of the pressure off the dam.

Well, it's that philosophy that we're going to place in application in our Secure Border Initiative. We're going to try to work with Congress to find a way to channel some of that economic pressure so that we can be more effective in our use of enforcement tools and our border tools.

Let me talk a little bit about one particular feature of what we're unrolling in our Secure Border Initiative strategy. As you know, when we apprehend Mexicans who come across in the Southwest border, we return them essentially immediately into Mexico, so there's no issue of detention, they just get caught and they get sent back. But when we deal with the aliens who come from other countries, the matter is a little bit more complicated, because they can't immediately be returned to their home countries. And so the question is, what do we do until we can return them?

Up until now there's been a policy down at the border called "catch-and-release." And that meant we caught people—people who were special-interest aliens or criminals were detained, but there simply weren't enough beds to detain everybody. And so when we ran out of beds, we basically put people out on bail. And not surprisingly, the majority of those people never showed up back to make their court appearances.

That's bad from a couple standpoints. First of all, it's demoralizing for people who make arrests. Secondly, it sends exactly the wrong message out to people from the home countries. What it says to them is, hey, if you're not from Mexico and you can sneak into the United States and you get caught at the border, all that's going to happen, most likely, is you're going to get released into the community. That is the opposite of deterrence.

So we are now in the process this year of changing that dynamic 180 degrees. What we're going to do is we're going to move from "catch-and-release" to "catch-and-remove," meaning that people who we catch at the border are not going to be released on bail; they are going to be held until they are removed back to their home countries.

And there are three elements to that strategy. One is more capacity, more beds to detain people. The second is faster turnover—the quicker we can get people back to their home countries, the quicker we clear a bed for somebody else. Look at it this way: If we can cut the time to return people to their home countries in half, it is the equivalent of doubling the beds. So that's a second element of the strategy. And the third element is deterrence. As we go to 100 percent catch-and-return, the word is going to get back to these originating countries that when you get caught, it doesn't mean you're going to be released, but you're going to have to make that trip all the way back to your originating country, you're going to lose all the money you spent, and you're going to be back at square one. And that kind of deterrence will ultimately, in fact, be a positive factor in helping us maintain a catch-and-return policy.

It is a kind of a variation of a well-known law enforcement technique which we used in narcotics trafficking enforcement and all kinds of other law enforcement techniques in cities, which is to really send a message about deterrence by being very tough and rigorous in how we track down all across the board.

So by using these three components—additional beds, streamlined removal, and reliance on deterrence -- we are moving from catch-and-release to catch-and-return this fiscal year. And we expect to see, as we continue to measure the flow of illegal migrants that we apprehend, some real indications of how well we're succeeding in this strategy.

Let me tell you about one tool that we recently put into place that's going to help, in terms of catch-and-remove, and that is what we call "expedited removal." As you know, under the typical system of removing people from this country when they're here illegally, they go before an immigration judge. That can take 90 days or more. Expedited removal allows us, in certain circumstances, when we're at the border, to cut that by a half or even two-thirds, because we don't have to go through a judicial process. We can find illegal migrants without documents or false documents, and make an immediate determination that they're here in violation of the law and send them right back. And that's part of what lets us cut down on that time that we have to hold people in detention.

So we are moving systematically—nationality by nationality—to apply expedited removal and catch-and-return across the border.

With respect to Hondurans and Brazilians and Nicaraguan nationals apprehended across the entire Southwest border, they're all now in expedited removal, and that's allowed us to decrease the processing time from an average of 90 days to approximately 32 days.

This week we added Guatemalans as another category to the expedited removal process. Just to give you some sense, Guatemalans totaled over 22,600 apprehensions in fiscal year '05, and for the first month-and-a-half of '06, we've already had 3,200 apprehensions. So this is a significant number of people.

People from these countries of origination are now going to be in expedited removal. They will be detained until they're returned, and they will be returned home. And of course, a big piece of this is pressing foreign governments to work with us to speed that process of returning people back home.

I'm pleased to say, for example, that we worked out an agreement with El Salvador a couple weeks ago that removes the cap that had previously been placed on the number of flights of non-criminal returning aliens we could send to El

...the cap on the number of people on the number of flights or other criminal returning...
Salvador. So now we are not limited to 70 a week, but we can return as many non-criminal migrants as we possibly can get on airplanes. So that's a positive step forward.

We've already, since we started the Secure Border Initiative, removed more than 3,000 non-Mexican illegal aliens using expedited removal, including approximately 300 Honduran nationals every week, which accounts for the highest number of non-Mexican illegal aliens that were removed over the past few years.

So the bottom line is, this is a comprehensive strategy; there's no one single magic bullet that's going to take care of the problem, but a disciplined approach, a systems approach, a carefully measured approach, and an approach that uses all our tools. Interception, detention, removal -- all those things taken together is the recipe for getting us to control the border, which, of course, is the goal the President has set forth and the mission that we will carry out.

Now to give you some more specifics about what that strategy is and how we're proceeding, I'm going to turn first to Chief Aguilar.

Chief Aguilar: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Good morning. Basically, what I'm going to try and take you through is where we began the fiscal year for '05, where we went at the end of year '05, and where we're going to be progressing to.

Last year, over in the Tucson and Yuma area of operations is where we had the greatest number of illegal alien apprehensions and narcotics apprehensions. For the entire fiscal year, the U.S. Border Patrol apprehended over 1.1 million total illegal incursions between the ports of entry for fiscal year '05. Within that year, we also apprehended 1.2 million pounds of narcotics also coming in between the ports of entry. Within that group of 1.1 million, we had over 165,000 of the other than Mexicans that the Secretary spoke to a few minutes ago. That is the criticality of our ability to put these classes of aliens into expedited removal. We also had a total of about 139,000 criminal aliens that were apprehended along our nation's border illegally coming back into the country.

Now, when we approached the beginning of the fiscal year, we initiated the Arizona Border Control Initiative. What we added was resources, the enhancements, part of what the Secretary just spoke to. One very critical part is going to be the resourcing of the border enforcement equipment, personnel, technology that we're going to apply. What was added in Arizona last year was a total of 200 officers that were detailed into that specific area of operation. We doubled the size of our air force in Arizona, took it to over 40 aircraft that were operating within that given area of operation. Prior to this, we were operating with about 18 aircraft in that area.

We also brought in an additional 300 agents into Tucson Sector. We added another 200 agents to the Yuma Sector, all in Arizona, for a total of over 500 additions to the state of Arizona.

There was a resultant impact in that in that we did see a displacement into New Mexico, but we preempted that displacement by also moving very quickly with the Secretary's authority to move over 105 Border Patrol agents into the Deming Corridor area of operation. Now, what did we get as a result of this resourcing that we did? We reduced the Tucson numbers of apprehensions by over 11 percent for the fiscal year.

Now, most of you will remember that when we started the Arizona Border Control Initiative, the point of the sphere, the area of focus was in the very dangerous area that we all know as the West Desert area of operation, the Sonoran Desert, where so many people were falling into distress and smugglers were concentrating their efforts. Within that specific area of operation, the apprehensions actually dropped by over 19 percent.

Now, we constantly measure apprehensions, but we also measure other metrics that tell us and to help us gauge our successes—what we refer to as third party indicators: the number of police calls from other agencies that we get relative to illegal alien incursions; the number of crimes associated with a typical elevated level of illegal immigration coming into the country; the number of stolen vehicles associated with illegal immigration and narcotics trafficking—all of those dropped dramatically during fiscal year '05. The displacement that happened into the Deming Corridor area of operation was addressed through the 105 agents and the addition of aerial platforms into that Deming Corridor also.

As we speak today, we still have 150 temporary agents detailed into Tucson; we have 105 detailed into the Deming Corridor area of operation—over 255 agents in that very critical area.

Now, in addition to that, you will be hearing quickly, in the next week or so, the Secretary make the announcement on the fiscal year '06 number of agents that are going to be added through the rest of the fiscal year in those areas of operations, and in fact, along the whole Southwest border of operations.

Now, in addition to what I just covered, we have actually now implemented the use of an unmanned aerial vehicle. Since the beginning of this fiscal year, the unmanned aerial vehicle that is flying in Tucson has been involved in the apprehension, the interdiction of over 1,000 illegal aliens in the Tucson area of operation. In addition to that, it has been involved in over 400 pounds of narcotics interdictions within that given area of operation. We are working with the FAA currently to expand our areas of operations to make more utility of the UAV. We feel that that's forthcoming and we'll shortly be able to expand our use of the UAVs in the Arizona area of operation.

As we speak today, we have over 400 Border Patrol trainees going through the academy in Artesia, New Mexico. Within that group of trainees at the academy, over 300—307, exactly, as of today, will be heading towards Arizona and New Mexico. Now, that's not the full deployment, but those are the ones that are going through the academy as we speak today.

In addition to that, the expedited removal, a very critical piece of the solution of reducing the number of illegal incursions between the ports of entry, this—I don't think I'm on audio, so I'll try and explain from here—what this chart up here represents, the color differentiations represent an individual sector. The one that I would point you to is the yellow line. What that yellow line depicts is the number of Brazilians that were being apprehended, literally on a daily basis, in our Rio Grande Valley Sector—south Texas, McAllen. What those lines represent—and those are the dates at the bottom—what those lines represent are upwards between 3,000 and 4,000 Brazilians per month being apprehended within an area of about 200 miles of south Texas.

Now, the dramatic drop that you see right there, if you will notice the date, is July 10th of this year. That's when expedited removal was implemented in that specific sector. You see the immediate drop of the Brazilians and the maintenance of that drop through basically the current year of operation right now. What that graph tells you is that we went from about 3,000 to 4,000 per month to 10 to 12 apprehensions per day of Brazilians. ER is working. The impact of the expedited removal is a tremendous tool for us to use.

This next chart basically depicts specifically to Hondurans. Hondurans apprehended in the same area of operation, you will see that they were peaking at about 130 a day also there; you will see them spike after we implemented expedited removal on September 12th; and what this depicts is the 26-percent drop that we have seen in a period of about a month now. Again, the impact is deterrence; the message gets back home very quickly and it creates that posture of stemming the flow from coming into the United States.

For further information on the detention program, I'm now going to pass it on to Director Torres, over at the Detention and Removal Office.

Director Torres: Thank you, Chief, and Mr. Secretary. Good morning. I want to talk a little bit more about the detention process for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. When we initiated the Secure Border Initiative, one of the first things that Secretary Chertoff implemented was a working group to study the process of removal, and to actually determine how we can remove people more efficiently. So one of the core focuses of the working group was to reengineer the removal process to attain that efficiency.

As we take a look at this slide here, one of the first items that this working group identified was that the use of expedited removal, as the Chief has discussed, in Operation Texas Hold 'Em, and also we use expedited removal in the Arizona Border Control Initiative, was actually a very efficient process. What you see in this chart here, over the years, in the light blue columns, are the total formal removals that ICE has effected of those aliens that were turned over to us for detention. And what you see in the blue column are the expedited removals. If you look in the years of 2002 through 2004, those removals in the blue column are expedited removal; those were the removals effected by inspectors at the ports of entry. In other words, a person came into the country, was not eligible to be here, expedited removal was implemented, he immediately turned around.

The difference here in 2005 is the Secretary expanded the use of expedited removal to in between the ports of entry, so now it could apply to those aliens that the Border Patrol are arresting -- in the desert, for example, or in Tucson, or Laredo, where we initially implemented this. So as you see in the chart, we would like to see that blue line rise a little bit higher, and in effect, what we're saying is we want to remove more people, using expedited removal, because the process is much quicker and efficient.

So, for example, in the blue line that you're seeing there, the average is about 90 days detention for every single person that we would effect a formal removal for. And in the dark blue line—the dark blue line is the average is about 32 days. And we're actually looking to drive that number down maybe to 15 days. So that's the significance of this chart here.

What this chart also doesn't show, though, is all the removals that the Border Patrol does—effects annually, which could be upwards of 900 to almost—900,000 to nearly a million people from Mexico that they can arrest and turn around very quickly.

If we go to the next chart here, it will actually show you the detention versus the removal during the Secure Border Initiative. This process relates to the Honduran nationals that we talked about a little bit earlier. Since we implemented the Secure Border Initiative, late September-early October, you can see the apprehensions and those turned over to detention for ICE spiked very high at the beginning, and slowly have dropped as deterrence takes effect, as well as some of the seasonal fluctuations of the smuggling patterns, et cetera.

The removal on the right side, on the dark blue, is now going higher, and actually, at some point, we'd like to attain... those that are being turned over for detention will be pretty much level with those that we're removing. And

attain—those that are being turned over for detention will be pretty much level with those that were removing. And you're starting to see that in this past week here.

And we'll go to the next slide, which relates to Brazilians, and what you see is, because we were actually using this in South Texas, with Operation Texas Hold 'Em, the expedited removal, there were significant numbers of Brazilians in detention already. Because it was so efficient, immediately we were able to remove a lot more people that we had in detention than the Border Patrol were actually arresting. And you see those numbers now—and this represents the Southwest border—the numbers of Brazilians apprehended are nearly down to zero over the last few weeks, and we're still able to remove the people that we have in custody and work into the backlog of those Brazilians that we had detained.

And then I'll show you one last slide here, and this slide really is representative of the total removals of Brazilians and Hondurans since we started the Secure Border Initiative. And you can see those removals will continue to rise until they level off where we actually see the deterrent effect taking place, so that there will be less apprehensions down the road.

So what we're doing now, is closely managing the bed space that we've allocated to this initiative. And we remain flexible to add more bed space as necessary. We will add those countries that we mentioned earlier—Guatemala this week—where we expect to see significant apprehensions, and immediate removals because of this process.

So with that, I'll turn it back over to Secretary Chertoff.

Secretary Chertoff: Before we take questions, I just want to add one thing. There's a very clear message we are sending people from countries that are considering coming into the United States. The word on the street used to be if you were a non-Mexican and you were caught, you would be released and therefore you were home-free. And I know that's a very bad message.

We are reversing that. If you are caught at the border, you are going to be detained, and you're going to be detained until you're sent back again. So all that trip into the country, all that getting smuggled through is going to be reversed. And all that money that the individual spent to get smuggled is going to be lost. And I think when that message gets out, it's going to cause people to reevaluate whether it makes sense for them to try to make that trip into the country. That's a very critical piece of deterrence.

Yes.

Question: Mr. Secretary—your strategy of enforcing the law to the employers, do you expect to arrest more people? And perhaps we'll see massive deportations to Mexico and some other countries?

Secretary Chertoff: What we expect to see, first of all, is we expect to see employers obeying the law. And part of what our strategy is not just to arrest people, obviously, who are here illegally and deport them, but to make sure employers are sanctioned. We are now moving into higher quality cases, cases, for example, with criminal penalties, where people who deliberately violate the law are subject to possible jail or criminal fines. And I think that's the kind of high impact strategy that we want to pursue.

But I do want to make a plug for a temporary worker program because the reality of the economics of the marketplace is that there's a powerful demand in this country for people to fill jobs Americans won't fill. And as long as we don't have a regulated temporary program to deal with that, we are putting the maximum amount of pressure on our enforcers. And we're really making the job that they have very difficult.

So we do need to have a powerful enforcement stick, but I do think we need to also have a discussion about a real opportunity to satisfy this economic need in a way that will be temporary and that will fit with our overall enforcement pattern.

Yes.

Question: Mr. Secretary, what's it going to mean for ICE—the work site enforcement, what's that going to mean for ICE employees? Is it a new focus? New initiatives, new resources?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, we have additional resources. I think we got 400 additional ICE agents, special agents and several hundred other enforcement agents that have come into the '06 budget. We're going to put them right to work. So it's going to be, obviously, additional resources. It's also going to be a strategy that focuses on high impact cases. We're going to be looking also at some of the things we might do with respect to law and regulation to make it a little bit more efficient for employers to find out whether they have legal aliens or illegal aliens working for them.

And at the same time, when people don't make that effort to find out whether their employees are legal, we're going to see if there are ways we can sanction them more swiftly and more strictly. So it's going to be we're looking at the whole system. And I can predict in the next weeks you're going to see a number of regulatory or policy changes that will be designed to do two things: make it easier for employers to verify employment, but also say if you don't verify

designed to do two things: make it easier for employers to verify employment, but also say if you don't verify employment, it's going to be a tougher punishment and a quicker punishment.

Yes.

Question: Mr. Secretary, can you talk about the technology upgrades, the follow-on to the America's Shield Initiative, and the possible RFP [Request for Proposal] to replace the gadgets that you were talking about?

Secretary Chertoff: We have a program office we've stood up, which is going to put together RFPs for an integrated package to deal with all of our issues at the border itself. As you know, right now we have miles of sensors, we have cameras, we've now got a UAV deployed. But there is a next generation of technology. There are more advanced sensors. We want to get those integrated into a package with the remote cameras. We want to have that integrated with what we do in terms of aerial surveillance. We want to look at the possibility of satellite technology as enhancing our ability to get greater visibility about what's going on on the border. So I don't want to jump the contracting rules here, but we do expect in short order to be soliciting for proposals to build an integrated next-generation technology system. Some of the stuff the military uses out in the field is adaptable, perhaps, as well, to what we're doing here. So we still need old-fashioned Border Patrol agents who are savvy. We still need to have beds and removal. But we also want to have high-tech.

Question: Mr. Secretary, reacting to Monday's speech by President Bush, President Fox in Mexico said that he wanted to help, and he wanted to be a partner in this effort. What kind of a role do you see for the Mexican government in all this? And have they been working already with the American government in any sense or any respect?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, I want to say the Mexican government has been working cooperatively with us in a number of respects. As I think you know, the Visa Waiver Program for Brazil was reversed this fall by Mexico. Visas are now going to be required. I certainly would attribute some of what we've seen in terms of the drop-off of Brazilian illegal migrants to that. That was a very helpful policy change. We do exchange information.

I know that the Mexican government is very concerned about some of the trafficking and smuggling organizations operating south of the border, a lot of violence. From a humanitarian standpoint, these smuggling organizations victimize migrants. So we're doing what we can to work cooperatively—joint operations against criminal groups, sharing of intelligence. And I look forward to having a constructive relationship and further discussion with the Mexican authorities about how we can pursue these issues.

Question: Mr. Secretary, you mentioned the new regulations. Could you give us a head's up on what new regulations are going to help employers?

Secretary Chertoff: You can't give a heads-up on new regulations because that violates the laws. You can only announce the regulations when they come out.

What I can say is we are looking at—Basic Pilot, which was a program that allows employers to check and verify their employees has been expanded from a number of states to a nationwide program. There are other things we are looking at. I think I've testified publicly about my concern that some employers feel that they can't—when they get a no-match letter from the Social Security Administration, they feel they can't pursue any further investigation about why there's a problem with the number. I think we're looking to see what we can do to address that problem.

We owe the employers giving them tools to verify their employees in a prompt and accurate manner. Once we give them those tools, though, they owe it to us to use those tools. And if they don't, we then have to sanction them.

Question: Mr. Secretary, a lot of critics will say that the catch-and-release is more window dressing, more of the same. And they point to some of the exceptions, the fact that it will apply only within a hundred miles of the border, and only to people who have been in the country for less than 14 days. And they feel that people will be trained, that the coyotes, the human smugglers, will tell them, just say you've been in the country 15 days or 16 days. And just as a follow-up, earlier this week, Secretary Rumsfeld acknowledged that we have some problems with our border system saying, we can't even protect our own borders. If you can comment to that, as well.

Secretary Chertoff: Well, let me deal with the first issue. Expedited removal, of course, at this point we've extended it just along the border. I'm not going to predict whether we would extend it further into the interior. I will tell you, though, that you don't avoid expedited removal simply by saying I've been here for 16 days. You've got to prove you've been here for more than 14 days. So I think the criticism that somehow this is going to be easy to evade is an overblown criticism.

As far as general comments about the border, look, we—this is a problem that's been 20 years in the making. As I think I said, 20 years ago I remember as a U.S. attorney going down to the border, and people were talking about—we were in San Diego, there was no fence at that point. People were sitting up there, waiting to run across the border. So we're not going to correct that in 20 days. What we do have, I think, now, is a comprehensive strategy. We've unified the Border Patrol for the first time. Under Chief Aguilar, we have a unified planning process, a unified deployment

process. We now have a real strategy in place.

Actually, the military is helpful to us. We get to—some of the benefits of their technology in training can be a real support for us. So, of course we look forward to working with Department of Defense, as well as with our own fine assets in achieving what is a difficult but achievable result, which is control of the border.

Yes.

Question: Mr. Secretary, can you address, is there—is there going to be any plans to put a UAV in El Paso to cover a broader area, including New Mexico? And are these 300 agents coming out of the academy, are they going to be displacing more veteran agents, which you referred to some of those being there on a temporary basis—are they going back there? Or is that actually an addition of 300?

Chief Aguilar: First of all, on the temporary agents that are in Arizona and now Deming, they are there for the purpose of immediate ramp-up of the enforcement resources that are there. As these 307 transition in, we will start pulling the detailers that are there now to ensure that we leave the resources behind that the sector chiefs need to do the job that they're doing.

So we will put in permanent resources and start pulling back the temporary resources, but leave the level that is going to be required to get the job done.

Now, one other very important thing that I failed to mention is that for the first time, for the first time, we have gotten, we the Border Patrol, CBP, has gotten money specific to apply tactical infrastructure—\$35 million—we had never gotten that—specific to Tucson, Arizona, \$35 million to finish or to continue working on the fence project in San Diego. We've been building that fence for over 10 years now, but we had never gotten that kind of money.

We have gotten additional monies for technology. So it's not just the agents. I urge you to think about, yes, its agents are absolutely key; they're critical. But it's the technology and the infrastructure that is going to be added along with those agents that will give those chiefs the capability to not only gain the control, but also maintain that control.

Question: Mr. Secretary, do you see SBI as a terrorism deterrent in any way? And if so, how? And also, I understand that the repatriation program is going to be expanded. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, first of all, the whole issue of the border is not only obviously a huge economic issue and a huge criminal issue, but is also a national security dimension, as well. It's important, though, when you look at the national security element not to only look at between the ports of entry. We have to look at the whole picture. We have to look at ports of entry; we have to look at land area between ports of entry—air and sea. And we are always working comprehensively in order to make sure we are properly raising the barrier in all those areas.

In general, anything that we do to increase the level of our securing the border is going to have a positive affect on our national security, and that only makes it more urgent that we do this in a systematic and efficient fashion.

Question: Repatriation?

Secretary Chertoff: Interior repatriation, which is a very helpful tool, is one that, again, it requires the cooperation of the Mexican government. We've achieved a good level of cooperation. We want to continue to work with them to increase the program. One of the arguments we've made in promoting interior repatriation is there's a humanitarian element. There are people who are crossing the border into the desert who really have no idea what they're facing, because if they did, they wouldn't be bringing nine-year-old kids to make a two-day desert crossing without food and water. No sane person would do that. So they're obviously being lied to by smuggling organizations who say to them, oh, yes, you just—it's going to be a two-hour walk, and you're going to be in Phoenix.

We've got—when those people get caught, it's a bad idea for them to try it again. And we've picked up too many people who are fatally, mortally injured in that trip to want to see people coming across there. So we're trying to encourage everybody we apprehend in this kind of interception—agree to come into an interior repatriation, we'll fly you back, we'll bus you back to your home area—because we don't want those people coming again. So, again, this is an issue we're working with the Mexican government on, and it has got a humanitarian, as well as an enforcement standpoint.

Question: Mr. Secretary, this question was asked to the President but he didn't respond directly, so I hope you give us a more direct response. This administration is in favor to have a wall along the whole border of Mexico? And if not, can you tell us why not? But if yes, when they are going to start—continue building the wall on the whole border?

And second question for ICE, are you guys going to continue to hire former Mexican police as informants in order to not just detain illegal immigrants, to stop the narcotics crossing on the border?

Secretary Chertoff: I don't think we're probably going to answer the second question because we're not going to get

into a discussion of informants.

As far as the first question, we don't support a wall across the border. A wall across the border would be phenomenally expensive; it wouldn't be particularly effective. We would still need to back it up with a lot of technology and a lot of agents. But there are parts of the border where fencing does make sense. It makes sense in urban areas where the distance between Mexico and an urban area in the United States is very short. And we saw in El Paso when we went down with the President that fencing is very useful there. Fencing is useful along the San Diego area, again, where there's a high density of American population. In the desert, fencing doesn't make any sense at all. It's a completely different model. So you could say in some ways we're going to have a virtual fence, because we will use a mix of technology and Border Patrol and infrastructure to create what is, in effect, a barrier to entry. But it's going to be a smart fence, not a stupid fence—a 21st century fence, not a 19th century fence.

Question: Sir, you said in the past that you would consider using tents to house detainees. Is that where additional beds would come from? And are any of the detainees still eligible to go before an administrative judge?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, we generally do—what we do is lease bed space. I don't know that tents actually have any economic advantage, because the real expense in housing people is the supporting infrastructure.

Expedited removal does not occur as a judicial proceeding. It's similar, as the Chief said, to what happens at a port of entry. When someone shows up, if they don't have documentation, or documentation is false, they get sent back.

Now, as always, the law is a little more complicated than a short answer, and there may be some legal circumstances where someone does get in front of a judge. But the idea of the process here really is to make it as efficient as possible because really it's all about clearing the beds and getting people back with—to have the deterrent effect.

Question: Mr. Secretary, you mentioned ports of entry. On US-VISIT, are you going to meet the deadline to have US-VISIT in place, in effect, at all ports of entry by the end of the year? Do you have a date certain for implementing the exit portion of that program? And several months ago, you said you wanted to see the fingerprinting—the two-digit fingerprinting replaced with 10 digits to bring it in compliance with FBI databases. Has that taken place yet?

Secretary Chertoff: We are working and anticipate being able to meet our goal in terms of entering US-VISIT. I don't have the statistics at the top of my head. But we are—we have deployed US-VISIT widely at ports of entry, at both land and air and sea, as well.

In terms of exit, that's an issue we're looking at. I have to say it's a complicated question. And we've got some pilot programs. We want to evaluate the utility and what we may want to do to retool that process.

And what was the third part of this?

Question: Fingerprints.

Secretary Chertoff: Yes. We are working to build a capacity to get 10 prints for first-time entrants into the country. That's not going to happen in two weeks, because first of all you've got to have fingerprint readers; you've got to have readers that are then capable of being deployed overseas; you've got to be able to integrate them with the databases. So it's not a program that's going to be finished in a year, but we are actively working that program now.

Question: Can you say you're going to meet that deadline on the ports of entry, the entry portion?

Secretary Chertoff: What I can tell you is we are working to the deadline. I am optimistic we're going to meet the deadline. You know, life sometimes has surprises, but we do our best.

Question: Is it logical to think that the 11 million-plus illegal immigrants living in this country will sign up to a program, a temporary worker program that basically asks them to go back to their country after a certain period of time?

Secretary Chertoff: I'll tell you what the logic is. First of all, you begin with the employers. The employers are driving the demand. The employers, by giving jobs to illegal migrants, are causing illegal migrants to come and stay. If illegal migrants don't have jobs, the vast majority of them, I think, are going to go back, back home again.

So part of the theory of the system is this: You give the employers a convenient, efficient and secure way to validate and verify that they have migrants who are temporary workers, but the understanding is that they then have to play by the rules, and when time is up, time is up and those workers have to be let go. And if this temporary worker program is deployed the way it should be deployed, what happens then is the marketplace; the demand for illegal workers dries up, because the demand is satisfied with legal temporary workers. Once that demand dries up, I'm not going to say everybody goes back, but the vast majority go back.

The other element is, you know, part of the way we design the program can involve an element of circularity, where as people, for example, have benefits that they earn working here in this country on a temporary basis, their ability to access those benefits at the end of the work period may require them to go back. So that will be an economic incentive

to go back.

Like any other issue involving large numbers of people, these are economic issues; these are driven by using the proper mix of incentives and deterrents. And I think we can build a system to do this. What I can tell you though, is, we also have no other choice. If we don't have a temporary worker program, I think it's going to be extraordinarily difficult to ask our Border Patrol agents and our ICE agents to stem the tide that is driven by a huge economic engine of employers looking for people to do work that won't be done by Americans.

So when you're—again, when you're trying to dam a river, I think you try to dam it smart, and that means channeling some of that water to a productive purpose. In this case we want to channel that economic impulse productively, regulate it, have it be temporary. And I think we can build a set of incentives that will let us do that.

Question: Mr. Secretary, you talk about changing the dynamics of illegal immigration. But as you know, there's a big public debate on the role of state and local governments. And you have state and local governments all over the map on this. You have some that are helping illegal immigrants with their actions, and others that are holding them. Weigh in on this—what do you think the role of local government should be?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, you know, our responsibility, the federal responsibility is the responsibility to deal with the issue of immigration and the borders. So I don't want to shift this onto somebody else. Now, we do work cooperatively with state and local governments. We have authority, for example, to train them to assist us in enforcing the immigration laws, and we welcome that assistance. We're working with a number of the border states now on finding ways to leverage their capabilities with ours.

You get into larger debates about how cities and states want to enforce the rules and what kind of funding they want to do for illegals. And those are often driven by legal considerations that I'm not in a position to speak about. I want to be sensitive to the fact that the federal government doesn't dictate to the states what they do. You know, there are certain things we can require, certain things we can't require. But we do look to the states, if they work with us, in a coordinated way, to be a powerful ally in doing what we need to do in order to get control of the borders.

Question: Mr. Secretary, on the temporary worker program, the details put forward by the administration have been fairly sketchy, other than to say that there wouldn't be any amnesty or any automatic legal permanent residence at the end of the program. Will you come forward with more details about what you want to see, or are you going to leave it to Congress to provide—basically to write in all of the specifics?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, I think we've been working with Congress. We've been talking with proponents of a number of different plans, and working with them to see what the most sensible plan is. I don't know that there's going to come a moment that we unveil some huge, very specific thing. I think it's like with anything else we do legislatively; it's a process of working with Congress, exchange of views, figuring out what makes sense and what's doable. And beyond that, I don't think I can give any kind of clear prediction.

Question: You've mentioned expedited removal. You have Guatemala coming on board on the program. Are there any other countries, such as Colombia and Argentina that you're trying to negotiate this with?

Secretary Chertoff: We're going to move this process forward systematically, based upon what we see in terms of the flow. We're not going to telegraph in advance as we add new countries, because we're not interested in encouraging people to make a last rush in. So we're going to use some of the element of surprise as an enforcement tool.

Question: Mr. Secretary, can I ask—I want to just press you a little bit on this worksite enforcement, because so far the focus has been looking at critical infrastructure—you'll go to a military base, for instance, and you'll crack down there. But when it comes to other areas, other sectors, it seems like worksite enforcement just isn't—it's nonexistent. So what, specifically, are you talking about when you talk about and refer to worksite enforcement? What are you going to do differently?

Secretary Chertoff: Well, first of all, of course, we have, obviously, picked areas of critical infrastructure and national security interest—airports, things like that—as our first area of priority. And that's true with any law enforcement issue. Any time I've been involved with law enforcement, where you just can't do everything at once, you always start with the most significant things, and that's what we've been doing. But it would be wrong to say we're not doing things in other areas.

There was a huge corporate fine paid recently by a large well-known company, which I won't mention, that related to worksite enforcement. We are currently doing some other very significant worksite enforcement operations, and starting to look to criminal penalties. We're adding more resources on.

But I also want to say, part of what we're going to try to do is find ways to be more efficient in sanctioning. If the only sanctions we use require a full-blown court proceeding, that's very time consuming and labor intensive. So we're going to study, are there ways to apply sanctions more rapidly, to give people better tools for checking, but then to be more

tough when they don't check. And as the weeks to come—as we get into the weeks to come, I think we're going to have some specific proposals to unveil with respect to each of these elements.

Question: Do you think the pilot program should be mandatory? I know there's a voluntary pilot program.

Secretary Chertoff: One issue we have to look at is to what extent we should make this kind of checking mandatory. Now part of that will be—our end of the bargain has to be, we have to have a database that's capable of dealing with that volume of requests. So there's, like anything else, I think the concept is not that hard. The actual execution requires making sure we build the necessary infrastructure technology and we have the right database. But the answer—the short answer is, we will look at all of those kinds of things to see if there are ways to create real incentives to get workplace company—companies to make sure their workplaces are in compliance.

Another thing we are doing is we're working with a number of major companies to have best practices, things that they can do that would really be—essentially establish the reasonableness of their due diligence. And the more we do that, the more we elevate the standard. And then, of course, we want to back it up with making a few examples when people violate the law.