

Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge Announces the Significant Steps in Enhancing Border Security Along the Mexican Border

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Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge and the Mexican Secretary of the Interior Santiago Creel today agreed on significant border safety and security initiatives in bilateral meetings in Mexico City. These agreements preserve the free flow of \$630 million in trade across the U.S./Mexico border every day while maintaining the integrity of the border. The United States and Mexico further agree to jointly and vigorously fight alien smuggling rings and to prosecute those who perpetrate these crimes.

"We are dedicated to one goal: to protect the American and Mexican people from the threat of terrorism," said Secretary Ridge following the meeting. Secretaries Ridge and Creel agreed to:

- Sign the 2004 U.S.-Mexico Action Plan for Cooperation and Border Safety
- Sign a Memorandum of Understanding on the Safe, Orderly, Dignified and Human Repatriation of Mexican Nationals
- Ensure the expansion of Secure Electronic Network for Traveler's Rapid Inspection (SENTRI) lanes at six additional land ports of entry this year
- Ensure the expansion of Free and Secure Trade (FAST) lanes at five additional land ports of entry on the southern border this year

Secretary Ridge reaffirmed President's Bush statement on Mexican President Vicente Fox's State Visit in September 2001 that "We have no greater friend than Mexico and our commitment never wavered." Secretary Ridge said of his meeting with Secretary Creel, "You can't choose your neighbors but you can choose your friends."

Last night, Secretary Ridge attended a dinner hosted by Secretary Creel and was joined by other members of President Fox's cabinet as well as the governors of the six border states, and this morning Secretary Ridge met with President Fox.

Secretary Ridge and Secretary Creel last met in November 2003 in Washington, DC. This is Secretary Ridge's first visit to Mexico as Secretary of Homeland Security. He last visited the country as Assistant to the President for Homeland Security in March of 2002.