



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Opening Statement of Chairman Chuck Grassley
Senate Committee on Finance
"Border Insecurity, Take Two: Fake IDs Foil the First Line of Defense"
Wednesday, August 2, 2006

Good morning. Today's hearing is entitled "Border Insecurity, Take Two." Our purpose is to follow-up on a hearing we held in 2003 to examine the security of our nation's borders and find out whether the situation has improved. At that hearing, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified about how easy it was for their investigators to create phony drivers licenses and other documents using a common personal computer. GAO then used those fake documents to enter the United States.

It's been nearly five years since 9/11 and more than three years since that hearing. Things should have gotten better by now. But, today GAO will testify that its investigators did it again. They used the same phony documents and the same fake IDs to cross the U.S. border 18 more times -- and they weren't even caught once. Those GAO investigators could have been known criminals, wanted fugitives, or even terrorists. But, they were just waived into our country. Frankly, it's hard to believe that there has been so little progress in plugging this gaping security hole.

Congress has tried to do its part. Since that last hearing, we passed the REAL ID Act to set federal standards for drivers licenses and the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative to require that everyone crossing the border carry either a passport or some other document that establishes identity and citizenship by 2008. Less than two years after setting that deadline, now some people are talking about putting it off. How ready are we? Today we'll get a progress report.

But, more importantly, what is being done in the meantime? What could be done to improve our security? Inspectors who work for U.S. Customs and Border Protection are this nation's first line of defense against criminals and terrorists coming to America. They should have the best tools and technology available to help them catch people using suspect documents.

However, as we will learn today, some stores give their clerks better tools to catch underage drinkers. That sounds incredible, but it is true. We will hear testimony about how private industry is using technology to scan documents of all types and determine in just a matter of seconds whether they are likely to be real or fake. We will hear how similar technology has been implemented in state DMVs to help them comply with the REAL ID Act. And, we also will hear about how foreign countries, like Chile and Singapore, have given inspectors these tools to help secure their borders.

If document verification technology works for the private sector, state governments, and

foreign countries there's no excuse for not using it to protect America's borders as well. Yet, Customs and Border Patrol appears to have no plans to implement any new technologies beyond sitting back and waiting for the Real ID Act and the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative to take effect. About 741 million people have crossed our borders since GAO's testimony at our last hearing. And about 300 million more will be crossing before the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative is implemented in 2008, assuming it is implemented on time. Until someone does something to address this problem, criminals and terrorists will know that our front door is wide open. Sitting around and waiting just isn't good enough.

One last thing before I turn to Senator Baucus for his opening statement. On our second panel today we will have some witnesses from private industry who sell document verification technology. I want to be very clear that these witnesses were invited today only to help Senators learn what kinds of solutions are currently available. The fact that they are testifying should in no way be taken as an endorsement by the Committee of any particular product or company.