



For Immediate Release
September 27, 2007

Contact: Carol Guthrie
202-224-4515

**Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Regarding Border Insecurity, Take Three: Open and Unmonitored**

In Henry the Fifth, Shakespeare wrote: "In cases of defense, 'tis best to weigh the enemy more mighty than he seems."

Today, in defending against terrorists, it is best to weigh tight security along our Nation's border as more important than it seems.

Six years have passed since 9/11. And, thank God, there has not been another terrorist attack on American soil. Some things have gone right. The hard work of law enforcement personnel has made a difference. But that does not mean that we can relax. It means that we need to redouble our efforts. We need to get border security right. Lives depend on it.

Today we are going to hear from the Government Accountability Office on their third border security investigation for the Finance Committee.

GAO's testimony today is, in a word, alarming. The GAO attempted to enter the United States in seven locations. I regret to report that they were successful in entering the U.S. largely undetected.

Adding to the seriousness of the security breach, the GAO investigators simulated the placing of nuclear material in the bag that they carried across the border. They demonstrated that terrorists have ample opportunity to carry nuclear material across the border into the United States.

Our borders are vast. As a Senator from Montana, I know better than most just how vast. But the success rate of the GAO investigators is a sobering sign. We have a long way to go in defending borders in rural areas.

Previously, the Committee has heard testimony on the attempt by GAO investigators to enter some of the 170 ports of entry on the northern and southern borders. The investigation that the Committee will hear about today involves those same investigators. This time, they attempted to cross unmanned and unmonitored areas between these ports of entry.

The GAO investigators assessed seven border areas that were unmanned, unmonitored or both. Four were on the U.S.-Canada border. And three were on the U.S.-Mexico border. In three of the four locations on the U.S.-Canada border, investigators carried a duffel bag across the border to simulate the cross-border movement of radioactive materials and other contraband.

On the northern border, the GAO found state roads close to the border that did not appear to be manned or monitored. And they were able to cross unchallenged, successfully simulating the movement of radioactive materials into the U.S. from Canada.

--more--

Also, on the northern border, the GAO located several ports of entry that had posted daytime hours and were unmanned overnight. They found barriers across the road that they could just drive around.

On the southern border, the GAO found large law enforcement and Army National Guard presence on a state road, including unmanned aerial vehicles. But GAO also found federally-managed lands adjacent to the U.S.-Mexican border that were unmanned and unguarded.

Are we really that unable to detect friends or foes coming across our national borders? We have a representative from U.S. Customs and Border Protection here today to update us on their progress.

I also want the Committee to hear about the threat that even small amounts of nuclear material could pose to our citizens.

In 2006, 150 incidents of illicit trafficking and unauthorized activities involving nuclear and radioactive materials were reported to the International Atomic Energy Agency. A 2002 report by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service said: "There are more international terrorist organizations active in Canada than anywhere else in the world."

The most well-known case of attempted terrorist infiltration from Canada involves Ahmed Ressay. He was an Algerian terrorist who was caught crossing the U.S.-Canadian border at Port Angeles, Washington, with approximately 100 pounds of explosives in his trunk. He was en route to Los Angeles International Airport for a millennium terror attack.

Of course, my special focus is to make sure that back door is not Montana's northern border. And I have been working to bring more resources to secure that border.

I'm pleased to see that the Department of Homeland Security Air and Marine Operations airbase is successfully up and running in Great Falls. Our appropriations process here in the Congress provided \$18 million to get our air base operational a year earlier than the Department of Homeland Security had planned.

At full capacity, the Great Falls Air Branch will consist of 52 federal personnel. Assets at the Branch will include apprehension aircraft, interdiction aircraft, and surveillance support aircraft. The Great Falls Air Branch will conduct regular mission patrols. It will be equipped for rapid incident response.

Great Falls is a good start. But we need to do more. As of May 2007, Customs and Border Protection had fewer than 1,000 U.S. Border Patrol Agents on the northern border. And Customs and Border Protection had nearly 12,000 agents on the southern border. The GAO investigation raises serious questions about the balance of resources on both borders.

I want to thank the GAO for their hard work on this investigation. And I want to thank Chairman Grassley for starting this line of investigation using the GAO. Their work has helped the Finance Committee to keep the focus on the critical issue of border security.

And so, let us weigh the enemy more mighty than we have. Let us weigh tight security along our Nation's border as more important than we have. And let us do what we can to ensure that many, many more years pass before another terrorist gets access to American soil.