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GAO SUMMARIZES FINANCE COMMITTEE BORDER SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS

Baucus, Grassley press CBP to detail use of machines to detect fraudulent documents at ports of entry

Washington, D.C. – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Ranking Member Grassley (R-Iowa) today commented on a Government Accountability Office (GAO) summary of three investigations conducted by the GAO for the Senate Finance Committee between 2003 and 2007 that exposed significant breaches in U.S. border security. The Senate Finance Committee requested a report of the GAO investigations as part of its congressional oversight of Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

Undercover GAO investigators successfully entered the U.S. through numerous ports of entry using counterfeit identification and by crossing open borders. They were also able to simulate moving radioactive material across the Canadian border without any resistance from Border Patrol agents.

“This GAO report summarizes a number of weaknesses in our border security. Montana has one of the longest American borders, and I’m committed to making certain that would-be terrorists and criminals aren’t taking advantage of weak border security to enter the state,” said Baucus. **“We need to make sure that Customs and Border Protection has the funding and the tools necessary to keep us safe.”**

“Unfortunately, the investigations summarized in this report fit a clear and troubling pattern. Year after year, the holes documented by the GAO in America's borders remain. It still is not clear whether officers on the front lines have the technology they need at border checkpoints to detect things like false identification. That is why we are asking for more details about what progress, if any, has been made since our previous hearings,” Grassley said.

Covert investigators with the GAO attempted to enter the U.S. with fake identification through the ports of entry on the northern and southern borders, and through international airports in Florida and Virginia. Out of 42 attempts, investigators showed a 93 percent success rate. On several occasions, investigators were not asked to show identification while using official U.S. border crossings. Investigators also successfully attempted to cross unmanned and unmonitored areas between those ports of entry. In three of the four locations on the US-Canada border, investigators carried a duffel bag across the border to simulate the cross-border movement of radioactive materials and other contraband.

Baucus and Grassley cited progress as reported by the Department of Homeland Security in its response to the GAO investigations, including:

- A 16 percent increase in the number of agents assigned to the Northern Border, from 972 in 2007 to 1,128 in April of 2008, with plans to double personnel staffing the Northern Border by 2010 – to 2,000 agents
- CBP has established a field testing system to perform covert tests with a focus on detecting and preventing illicit radioactive material from entering the U.S.
- Advanced equipment has been provided to assist with the examination and detection of fraudulent documents

The Finance leaders continue to press Customs and Border Protection by asking questions in a letter released today on the issue of the availability of machines able to read identification documents, such as driver's licenses, at the border crossings. This issue was explored in depth at the second Finance Committee hearing on the GAO border security investigation. A copy of the Senators' letter and the full GAO report are attached.

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