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**U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords**  
**Statement on Border Patrol Checkpoint**  
**September 21, 2007**

The Tucson sector is the weakest link in our nation's immigration enforcement system along the US-Mexico border. Every other sector has far more infrastructure than ours and most have checkpoints. There are 34 interior checkpoints between Texas and California. So it is not a coincidence that Southern Arizona is experiencing an unprecedented flow of illegal immigrants and drugs.

During the past 12 months, the Tucson Sector has accounted for approximately 370,000 of the 838,369 illegal immigrants apprehended along the U.S.-Mexico border - about 44 percent of all apprehensions.

The total number of marijuana seizures during this same period was 1.8 million pounds - 900,000 pounds of that were seized in the Tucson Sector alone.

As a U.S. Representative for this area, I cannot and will not stand by and allow this sector to remain the major route for smuggling into our country. We need a comprehensive strategy to address this most serious problem which has been allowed to go on for too long and has had a devastating impact on our communities.

As most of you know, the federal prohibition on permanent checkpoints in the Tucson Sector was lifted by Congress last year, before I was elected to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. As a result, in November, 2006, the Border Patrol stopped moving its checkpoint up and down I-19 and fixed it at kilometer 42. It also began planning to build an interim checkpoint and a more permanent checkpoint in the Tucson Sector.

Recognizing that many of my constituents had serious concerns about a permanent checkpoint, I insisted that the Border Patrol delay planning for any new checkpoint until citizens had an opportunity to ask questions and make recommendations.

On April 30th I convened the Community Workgroup on Southern Arizona Checkpoints. In the four and half months since then, this group of concerned citizens has spent countless hours examining every aspect of the Border Patrol's plans to build a permanent checkpoint along Interstate-19.

The Workgroup held five public forums at which hundreds of Southern Arizonans participated. They shared ideas, experiences and engaged in thoughtful, sometimes passionate discussions.

Last month the Workgroup presented their Report of Findings and Recommendations on Checkpoints to an audience of over 600 citizens, Tucson Sector Chief Robert Gilbert and me. This exceptionally thorough document provides a detailed analysis of the complexities of the checkpoint issue.

The men and women who wrote the report did an outstanding job, and I am very appreciative of their hard work and practical contributions to this process.

The report reflects the fact that there are differences of opinion about how best to secure Arizona's border. But it also demonstrates that community involvement, creativity and the willingness to try new ideas is absolutely essential in confronting the crisis on our borders. I strongly believe that when smart minds and concerned citizens come together, the best results emerge.

I asked the Border Patrol for a point-by-point response to the Workgroup report. I have received this document along with a letter from Chief Gilbert that outlines the Border Patrol's plans for moving forward.

I am pleased to announce that the Border Patrol has listened to my concerns and agreed to a major change of course based on the Workgroup recommendations and my recent discussions with them.

At my request, the Border Patrol has discarded its initial checkpoint plan. This is a significant concession. It will not please everyone, but I believe it goes a long way in meeting the concerns of residents along I-19 while also giving the Border Patrol the tools it needs to do its job.

In his letter to me, Chief Gilbert explains that he has changed the location for the interim checkpoint to kilometer 41.5 or 42 and will improve the checkpoint that currently exists. Previously the Border Patrol had been planning to operate a

checkpoint between kilometers 50 and 52, near Amado. The change places the interim checkpoint six miles closer to the border.

The Border Patrol responded to my concerns and the outcry from citizens that a checkpoint should not be located in a densely-populated area and should be as close to the border as possible.

The Border Patrol has also committed to scale back its plans for a permanent checkpoint by focusing on a design that is much smaller than the facility in Laredo, Texas.

The Laredo checkpoint model is officially off the table. I applaud this decision.

My constituents made their views clear - they do not want such a massive facility in Southern Arizona. The Border Patrol got the message.

I believe that an interior checkpoint on I-19 is critical. I support it. An interior checkpoint should be part of an essential secondary defense strategy that helps the Border Patrol capture those who elude security measures directly on the border.

Based on all that I have learned at our many community meetings, I support a checkpoint that is:

- Stationary
- Located away from major population centers;
- Equipped with the technology and manpower to effectively apprehend illegal human and drug traffic;
- Part of a plan to enhance the public safety of nearby communities; and
- Expedites the flow of commercial traffic.

Checkpoints are not new to us in Southern Arizona. We have had them on I-19 for many years. Despite its deficiencies, the existing make-shift checkpoint has played an important role in apprehending illegal immigrants and seizing drugs. From October, 2006, when it became stationary and stopped moving up and down the highway, to July, 2007, the Border Patrol arrested 6,925 illegal immigrants. During a comparable timeframe when the checkpoint was still moving back and forth (October, 2005 - July, 2006), the Border Patrol had only 3,690 apprehensions.

In comparing these same two timeframes, marijuana seizures while the checkpoint has been fixed was 59,346 pounds, compared to only 17,562 pounds seized when it was traveling back and forth.

But we can do even better. The existing checkpoint does not have adequate cameras, radar and border patrol agents to deter flanking and unintended impacts on nearby residents. The interim checkpoint will include these improvements.

Over the coming months, I will be closely monitoring the progress of interim and permanent checkpoint planning and focusing on several key factors:

**Effectiveness:** Workgroup members recommended establishing clear measurements to determine the effectiveness of the interim checkpoint. I agree and have asked the Border Patrol to report to Congress every six months on apprehensions, seizures, levels of community violence, costs, traffic patterns and environmental impacts.

The Border Patrol must be held accountable. I and other member of Congress want to see the numbers. The examination of a fully-equipped interim checkpoint will provide us the opportunity to evaluate whether or not a permanent structure makes sense and is cost effective.

In addition to requesting data collection on the interim checkpoint, I will ask the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to provide an independent, third party evaluation of the effectiveness of checkpoints in the Tucson sector and other parts of the country. Joining in this request will be Sen. Jon Kyl and Congressman Raul Grijalva. This study will also look at how a permanent checkpoint fits into a comprehensive border security plan for the Tucson Sector.

**Community Safety:** Checkpoints will only work in Southern Arizona if they make our border more secure while also providing more safety, not less, to our communities. A checkpoint must be properly staffed and equipped to ensure the safety of residents who live near the checkpoint and have the necessary high-tech capabilities including radar, cameras and ground sensors. These features must be part of the Border Patrol's interim checkpoint. To that end, I wrote to U.S. Border Patrol Chief David Aguilar in May, requesting him to takes steps to improve community safety near the existing checkpoint on I-19. He responded favorably by adding more patrol agents, sensors, sky watch towers, and ground surveillance radar. Additional public safety enhancements are needed at the new interim checkpoint.

**Overall Strategy:** Checkpoints must be part of a comprehensive border security strategy in the Tucson sector. As many of my constituents have argued, we must focus on securing the border at the border. This must be the primary emphasis of the Border Patrol. Cameras, ground sensors, radar and satellite communications, fencing and vehicle barriers in strategic areas must be increased at the border, along with more patrols of roads adjacent to the border. Other critical elements of a

comprehensive strategy include additional resources for the federal judicial system to enforce immigration laws.

**Local Law Enforcement:** I share the Workgroup's concerns about the impact of illegal immigration on local law enforcement agencies. This is why I fought to increase funding for the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program. I am pleased to report that we were able to add \$70 million to the program.

The Tucson Sector is the most porous section of the entire US-Mexico Border: 48% of the drug traffic and 44% of the illegal human traffic that crosses through the US-Mexico border enters along Southern Arizona's Tucson Sector. Approximately 1,049 illegal immigrants and 2,749 pounds of narcotics are smuggled through this region every day.

Our environment, public safety, national security and financial stability are threatened by our border security crisis. There are also hundreds of people dying in our desert every year. Since October 1, 2006 186 people lost their lives crossing the desert in Southern Arizona. The situation is unacceptable.

Insufficient border security is only one aspect of our broken immigration system. I am a strong advocate for comprehensive immigration reform, and I supported efforts in the House and Senate to pass such legislation. Our hospitals, social services, schools, law enforcement agencies and our neighborhoods bear an incredible burden that results from the inability of the federal government to change immigration laws.

I will continue to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make the federal government more accountable and effective in managing immigration policies and to take common sense steps to bolster border security.

Improving border security in the Tucson Sector is my top priority. I am committed to doing everything in my power to stop the flow of illegal drugs and illegal immigrants into our communities.

I call on the many concerned citizens of this area to support this comprehensive approach and help us close off our backyard to smuggling. We must use all necessary human, structural and technological resources to accomplish this goal.

Once again, I would like to thank the many citizens, Border Patrol officials, community leaders and civic organizations that engaged in the Workgroup process. Investigating how to improve border security, while also protecting our communities and reducing negative impacts of illegal immigration, is not easy.

The public has played a decisive role in this process, and I believe we have made our government more responsible because of it.

I will continue to pay close attention to the issue of checkpoints and how they fit into a larger border security strategy for Southern Arizona. I will continue to engage citizens and make thoughtful decisions.

I want to reiterate that I am committed to doing what is necessary to more effectively secure our international border and all of Southern Arizona.