

March 21, 2007

Commissioner W. Ralph Basham
Department of Homeland Security
Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W.
Washington, DC 20229

Is Customs and Border Protection aware of the serious attrition and retention problem that exists with the U. S. Border Patrol, San Diego Sector? Are you aware that the most significant factor contributing to this attrition and retention problem is due to economic and financial hardships suffered by many Border Patrol Agents assigned to the San Diego Sector? Are you aware that from 1996 to 2001 the San Diego Sector maintained an authorized work force of 2,000 to 2,200 Border Patrol Agents, and today has only 1,400 Border Patrol Agents? I didn't think so! Now, the main question is what are you going to do about it?

It is now my understanding that Customs and Border Protection, Office of the Border Patrol, Washington, DC has recently sent out a directive entitled "clean shifts". This directive ordered all Chief Patrol Agents of the Border Patrol Sectors to do away with varying shifts and go to three standard shifts (2400 to 0800, 0800 to 1600 & 1600 to 2400). While this might be great for the Office staff at DHS/CBP/OBP since they do not work shift work, it has had a devastating affect on the morale and financial hardship of thousands of Border Patrol Agents, especially in San Diego Sector. Each and every Border Patrol Agent who is entitled by law and has been receiving additional Sunday pay and night differential is now going to lose up to \$5,000.00 a year in pay cuts. While this may not be an economic crisis or financial hardship for a Border Patrol Agent assigned in the States of Texas, New Mexico or Arizona, it is going to be a tremendous financial hardship on the Agents in the San Diego Sector. Does anyone in your office realize just how expensive it is to live in San Diego, California on a GS-5, GS-7, GS-9 or even GS-11 pay? Why don't you send one of your staffers out to San Diego Sector and see what the cost is to RENT a two bedroom apartment or even worse what it costs to buy a two-three bedroom home and not have to live with the gang bangers or illegal aliens in east San Diego. The rent will be somewhere around \$1,158 a month average and the cost to purchase a two to three bedroom home will be between \$400,000 to \$700,000.

I want to give you a little background information and history concerning San Diego Sector, since I am sure that you are by now asking yourself who is this Beasley guy. I retired from the U. S. Border Patrol on July 3, 2002 after 31½ years of service. From 1996 to 2001, I was the Deputy Chief Patrol Agent of the San Diego Sector which maintained an authorized work force of 2,000 to 2,200 Border Patrol Agents during those years. It is my understanding that San Diego Sector now has around 1,400 agents to conduct operations. As far back as I can remember in my career with the Border Patrol, the past practice of assigning shifts for Border Patrol Agents was left up to the Patrol Agents in Charge of the station. And again, as far back as I can remember, the shift assignments varied in order to meet the operational needs of the station. What this translates to is that all Border Patrol stations had 3 to 6 varying shifts to fight the war on terrorism, drugs and alien smuggling in their AOR (area of responsibility). Also, for more than 30 years, the Border Patrol paid additional Sunday pay and additional night differential when working these different shifts. This was a sound business decision that bolstered morale, enhanced retention, and enabled the agency to accomplish its mission more effectively. Reversing it has had the opposite effect.

Sometime in 1998, while serving as the Deputy Chief Patrol Agent in San Diego Sector, I prepared a document addressing the economic and financial hardships suffered by San Diego Sector Border Patrol Agents. This document was forwarded to the Office of the Chief Patrol Agent, Headquarters Border Patrol, Washington, DC. And as typical of Headquarters, the document received absolutely no recognition or consideration. The document explained in detail the hardships being faced by San Diego Sector Agents and what could be done by the Agency to fix the problems. The following are ideas and suggestions that were submitted in the document:

- All branches of the U. S. Military pay their personnel reenlistment bonuses to stay on active duty for an additional four years. Why not pay U. S. Border Patrol Agents reenlistment bonuses to stay in the San Diego Sector for an additional four years?
- The U. S. Navy built and provided beautiful low rent housing for their married enlisted personnel on Telegraph Canyon Road in East Lake (south San Diego). Why doesn't DHS/CBP do the same for the lower graded GS agents and their families?
- The U. S. Government compensates certain Scientific and Professional positions with "Special Rate Pay" that are extremely difficult to recruit and fill in certain parts of the United States and abroad. Why not look at "Special Rate Pay" for difficult positions like San Diego to fill and sustain?
- The FBI pays their Agents an additional \$25,000 a year incentive bonus when they are assigned to Puerto Rico or to New York City, New York. The reason for this bonus is because NO Agents wanted to go to Puerto Rico or New York City, so the bonus was necessary to get agents to these locations. Border Patrol Agents do not want to be assigned to the extremely high cost of living area such as San Diego, so why not pay them an incentive bonus to go there.
- Hardship duty stations. Throughout my 31+ years working with the Border Patrol, numerous Border Patrol stations were designated as "Hardship Duty Stations". The designation meant that housing and/or financial compensation was provided to agents assigned to one of these "Hardship Duty Stations". Ft. Hancock, Texas, Presidio, Texas, Sierra Blanca, Texas and Sasabe, Arizona were all designated at one time or another. It is quite possible that Presidio, Texas and Sasabe, Arizona are still considered "Hardship Duty Stations". Why not designate several stations within the San Diego Sector as "Financial Hardship Duty Stations" and provide either adequate housing or financial assistance to trainee agents?
- San Diego Sector has been the "stepping stone" for many years for Border Patrol Agents who accepted assignments in San Diego, struggled under extreme financial hardships for a couple of years and then transferred off to Arizona, New Mexico or Texas, or accepted positions with DEA, FBI, Customs or the US Marshals Service for higher grades and better pay.

The following chart displays how significantly higher the cost of living in San Diego, California is compared to several other border cities along the Southwest border. Although the cost of living is significantly higher in San Diego, CA, the base salary is only \$3,389.00 per year higher, or only \$130.00 more per pay period. For the Border Patrol to recruit qualified applicants and retain experienced agents in the San Diego Sector, the Office of Border Patrol must provide retention bonus pay and/or housing allowances to make up the difference in the cost of living.

COST OF LIVING COMPARISON (Select Southwest Border Stations)								
Based on a U.S. Border Patrol Agent base salary of GS - 11/4								
September 20, 2006								
Categories	San Diego, CA	Douglas, AZ	Ajo, AZ	Tucson, AZ	Deming, NM	El Paso, TX	Del Rio, TX	McAllen, TX
1 Annual Salary	\$60,559	\$57,170	\$57,170	\$57,170	\$57,170	\$57,170	\$57,170	\$57,170
2 Bi-weekly salary	\$2,329	\$2,199	\$2,199	\$2,199	\$2,199	\$2,199	\$2,199	\$2,199
3 Median Home Cost	\$491,000	\$124,600	\$128,000	\$175,100	\$99,600	\$96,500	\$79,500	\$99,400
4 Mortgage Payment	\$3,267	\$829	\$852	\$1,165	\$663	\$642	\$529	\$661
5 Apartment Rent	\$1,158	\$596	\$746	\$746	\$456	\$564	\$486	\$610
6 Housing	235.5	59.8	61.4	84.0	47.8	46.3	38.1	47.7
7 Food	114	104	104.4	104.4	104.1	102.4	87.5	81.2
8 Utilities	125.9	108.1	105.1	105.1	90.2	95.6	88.4	95.4
9 Transportation	112.8	103.3	105.7	105.7	90.9	103	97.3	94.5
10 Health	129.6	102.3	110.2	110.2	94.7	95	96.5	109
11 Miscellaneous	104.1	95.1	95.4	95.4	97.8	93.4	101.3	100.9
12 Total of lines 6-11	821.9	572.6	582.2	604.8	525.5	535.7	509.1	528.7

Difference to San Diego, California

Categories	San Diego, CA	Douglas, AZ	Ajo, AZ	Tucson, AZ	Deming, NM	El Paso, TX	Laredo, TX	McAllen, TX
1 Annual Salary	\$60,559	-\$3,389	-\$3,389	-\$3,389	-\$3,389	-\$3,389	-\$3,389	-\$3,389
2 Bi-weekly salary	\$2,329	-\$130	-\$130	-\$130	-\$130	-\$130	-\$130	-\$130
3 Median Home Cost	\$491,000	-\$366,400	-\$363,000	-\$315,900	-\$391,400	-\$394,500	-\$411,500	-\$391,600
4 Mortgage Payment	\$3,267	-\$2,438	-\$2,415	-\$2,102	-\$2,604	-\$2,625	-\$2,738	-\$2,605
5 Apartment Rent	\$1,158	-\$562	-\$412	-\$412	-\$702	-\$594	-\$672	-\$548
6 Line 12 (table above)	821.9	-249.3	-239.7	-217.1	-296.4	-286.2	-312.8	-293.2

Data obtained from Sperling's Best Places, at www.bestplaces.net (September 17, 2006).

Annual Salary: Based on the base salary for a GS - 11/4 Border Patrol Agent found at www.opm.gov.

Median Home Cost: The value of the recent home sales date (January to December 2005).

Mortgage Payment: Based on the median home cost with a 30 year fixed mortgage and a 7.00% interest rate (mortgage calculator from www.bankrate.com).

Housing: The average cost of housing, which includes mortgage payments, apartment rents, and property tax.

Apartment Rent: The average rent for a two bedroom apartment.

Food: The average cost of food and groceries (not including restaurants).

Utilities: The average cost of heating and cooling a typical residence for the area, including electricity and natural gas.

Transportation: The average cost of gas, car insurance and maintenance expenses, and mass transit for the area (cost of vehicle licensing not included).

Health: The average cost of health care calculated using the standard daily rate for a hospital room and doctor's office visit and dental checkup.

Misc: The cost index of those goods/services not included in other cost of living categories: clothing, restaurants, repairs, entertainment, and other services).

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Commissioner Basham. I can assure you that if you will look closely at the facts and statistics provided for the San Diego area, it would be a simple tasking for your Agency to make the necessary changes and make life better for the Border Patrol and DHS/CBP. Instead of creating more SES political appointee positions such as an Under Secretary for this and a Deputy Under Secretary for that at the Washington level, why don't you use that funding and provide financial assistance to the San Diego Sector. Would it not be more practical and beneficial for DHS/CBP to continue to have trained and seasoned agents assigned to the San Diego Sector rather than bringing in more trainee agents 3-4 times a year to address your attrition and retention problem? Invest some of your multi-billion dollar budget into the San Diego area with better pay, government housing, financial assistance and signing bonuses for those agents who are willing to remain in San Diego. The morale will increase, you will have a truly professional work force and the agents will be able to afford to live there. Taking away approximately \$5,000 a year from every San Diego agent with this "clean shifts" initiative will do nothing but drive more agents into the arms of other federal agencies. These federal agencies will jump at the chance to bring well trained, Spanish speaking seasoned agents into their ranks. They have been doing it for years at the expense of the Border Patrol. Let's do something to help the working agent out in the field and finally address the attrition/retention problem in the San Diego Sector.

Harold R. Beasley, Sr.
Retired Deputy Chief Patrol Agent (San Diego)

CC: Senator Dianne Feinstein
CC: Senator Barbara Boxer
CC: Representative Duncan Hunter
CC: Representative Bob Filner
CC: Secretary Michael Chertoff, DHS