



EBTC INFORMATION BULLETIN

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SUBJECT: False claims at the border

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Did Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff put a convenient spin on statistics about apprehensions at the U.S.-Canada border in order to support new rules that his department is imposing there? Senators who oppose the plan to tighten identification requirements say he did.

In announcing an end to the "honor system" under which Americans and Canadians can enter the United States simply by presenting a driver's license or declaring their citizenship, Chertoff wrote to lawmakers that people had made 1,517 false claims of U.S. citizenship at land crossings in the past three months. That included one man with an outstanding arrest warrant for a homicide charge in California.

A spokesman for U.S. Customs and Border Protection acknowledged this week, however, that only 20 of the recent cases -- and 210 out of 31,060 false claims in the past three years -- occurred at the border with Canada. The other 99 percent came at the Mexican border.

[Sen. Patrick J. Leahy](#) (D-Vt.), one of the recipients of Chertoff's letter, said that "the number along the U.S.-Canadian border is minimal at best," while the economic costs of delays caused by tighter security will be greatest on the northern border.

"Even one illegal crossing is one too many, but Secretary Chertoff ought to at least level with the public in his justifications for turning a policy inside out," said [Sen. Charles E. Schumer](#) (D-N.Y.), who also received the letter from the head of the Department of Homeland Security.

Chertoff's spokeswoman defended the new rule, under which people 19 and older will be asked to present a passport or, when available, an enhanced driver's license or border pass card. Otherwise, both a regular driver's license and a birth certificate or other citizenship document will be required.

"Clearly, we need to decrease the number of documents that officers need to sift through in order to make admissibility decisions," said DHS spokeswoman Laura Keehner. "Regardless of whether people are coming in at the northern or southern borders, this is a known vulnerability that the 9/11 Commission has recommended that we change or close."