

FORMER INS HEAD MEISSNER URGES SAN DIEGO TO LEAD NATION ON BORDER SECURITY

Executive Director's Column

BORDER SOLUTION IN OUR HANDS, AND MEDIA'S

I still haven't figured out what it means about our local media that they buried, mangled, or ignored what should have been – and could still be – a major, on-going regional story of national significance.

At least a dozen print journalists and a half-dozen television reporters with cameras attended the Dialogue's Forum Fronterizo in December with Doris Meissner. As the former head of the U.S. immigration service, Meissner knows San Diego and the border like the back of her hand. She is arguably the best person in the country to advise us on the serious border-crossing problem we have been experiencing since September 11.

She did not disappoint. She said San Diego had the opportunity and, in her opinion, also the obligation to lead the nation on border security. (See her remarks, this page.) And she went on to explain that the main elements of a solution are already in our hands, particularly the special SENTRI commuter lanes at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa.

Meissner helped to create these lanes for frequent crossers who are willing to submit themselves to a criminal background check and pay an annual fee. Participants in SENTRI routinely cross in three minutes or less, even in the current crisis.

About SENTRI, Meissner said: "It is the best tool that is available and in operation today to ensure border security. Because it takes away the guesswork. It basically moves the vast majority of people who are lawful and law-abiding, and allows the resources to be focused on the people who could be questionable, the people that are first-time crossers, the people who are high risk."



Exec. Dir. Chuck Nathanson

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As Commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) during the Clinton Administration, Doris Meissner was one of San Diego's very best friends in Washington. She came here often to oversee improvements in INS operations at the border and to prove her key point that good law enforcement and good traffic facilitation can and must go together. The dramatic drop in wait times in those years owed much to her leadership.



Doris Meissner

At the invitation of the Dialogue's Forum Fronterizo, Meissner – now Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace – came again to San Diego in December to advise on our current border crisis. Her important message is reprinted here.

Over the course of the last seven years, San Diego has been the flagship of an effort by the INS to really change the way the government goes about the business of managing the border. The vision that we put on the table in 1994 was a vision of building what we called borders that work in the context of NAFTA — which is to say the context of an increasingly globalized world and interdependent economy, and a particularly robust interdependence among the countries of Mexico, the United States, and Canada.

"SENTRI is the best tool available today to ensure border security."

Our goal was very simple. It was to prevent illegal immigration and to facilitate and support the legal movement of people and goods. We had to begin in-house to be sure that our own Border Patrol and ports of entry were singing from the same sheet of music. We made a major emphasis on resources, and we were extremely successful in bringing massive new resources to the San Diego area. But, as Chuck Nathanson said in his introduction, you don't just do it with more people. You've got to change the way you do business, and so we asked not only for people, but for equipment and technology so that we could work smart. Those were permanent investments, and they've had a permanent payoff.

In addition, we made very, very active outreach efforts within the executive branch with our fellow agencies, particularly the United States Customs Service. And that extended to intergovernmental communication and coordination with local law enforcement and local government officials. We also put a leadership team into place that

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Meissner's Message:

GETTING CONTROL OF THE BORDER HAS ALLOWED THIS REGION TO FLOURISH

was exceptionally talented. I especially want to acknowledge Alan Bersin's role in all of this because prior to being Superintendent of Schools, of course, he was the United States Attorney and also had been designated by the Attorney General as the Southwest Border Coordinator and really took the lead in keeping this gaggle of geese together in a very good way. And that was pivotal.

"San Diego established itself as the lead actor for demonstrating a very big idea."

Outreach to the Community

We also emphasized outreach to the community because it was absolutely necessary to enlist and engage as many actors as possible from neighborhoods to the business community, the research community, the media, all of the different players and I'm sure that all of those players are represented in this room today, which is why it's really so very satisfying to see you all. San Diego Dialogue and Chuck Nathanson, in particular, played a critical role, and he is the other player that needs to be acknowledged at this time, not only for convening this session, but for having really stuck with it for so many years, and been an invaluable intermediary and catalyst and sparkplug for what has taken place in this region.

Our aim over the long term was to break down the we/they relationship that had so long existed, and that so typically exists, between the federal government and local communities in so many areas of work. Finally, of course, there is the cross-national relationship and the coordination and communication with our friends in Mexico, which also was very rich and very productive in this region and is increasingly important to making these regional efforts succeed.

The results were very impressive. We should remind ourselves that this area of the border less than 10 years ago was the highest crossing area for illegal immigration in the entire country. All of the negatives that went with that defined the life of the region, and that is now history.

The corresponding benefits of getting control of the border have allowed this region really to flourish. There's been a reduction in crime. There are safe neighborhoods. The border state park actually has people that go and have picnics. The environment has been restored in key areas of the border. There is new housing and investment in areas that once were no-mans-lands, and the list goes on and on. The Border Safety Initiatives and measures that we put into place have been critical and necessary and are ongoing and are growing. In fact, I just spoke to my San Diego Padre friend to realize that he's now involved in one element of border safety efforts, so I'm very pleased to hear that that is continuing in a partnership realm as well.

The ports of entry then were the other element of those results and of that success. And as Chuck has said, the goal was maximum waiting times of 20 minutes or less; that was an enormously ambitious goal to establish. We were talking about waiting times of two hours and more, and by and large we succeeded in being able to achieve that 20 minute goal, and that too had very important corollary benefits in terms of increasing sales, revenues to local communities, output and productivity to the business community and, therefore, the overall prosperity of the region.

The Jewel in the Crown

The jewel in the crown ultimately was the SENTRI system because it allowed us to put into place state of the art technology that embodied the broad idea that facilitation and enforcement do not need to be contradicting each other. That facilitation and enforcement are both sides of the same coin. The better you do at facilitation the more likely you are to have effective enforcement and do, as Chuck has said, focus your resources on the bad guys, on the dangers, and recognize that the vast majority of crossings are law abiding and need to be treated in that way.

Now, there always are things that need to be improved, but overall I think it is fair to say that a transformation occurred in this region. And San Diego established itself as the lead actor, really as the

locale, for demonstrating a very big idea. And that is the idea that we can capitalize in the future on increasing trade, increasing movement of people, freer flows of all goods and capital across our borders and that that is the way to succeed and survive in an increasingly interdependent globalized economy.

"Our aim was to break down the we/they relationship that had so long existed between the federal government and local communities"

Meissner's Message: *THE NEW BORDER CHALLENGE IS TO RECONCILE GLOBALIZATION WITH SECURITY*

What we've seen, of course, with September 11, is the dark underbelly of that globalized economy and of that trend that was so excitingly demonstrated here in San Diego. And so it's forced us as a nation to examine a wide ranging set of characteristics of American life and to look at them now through a security lens. So the question is: how do we reconcile this new security paradigm that must be put into place with a globalized economy when it comes to managing our borders?

I think there is an emerging consensus among experts as well as practitioners that way that you go about risk reduction in an era of terrorism involves the following elements. First, where goods are concerned, we have to be thinking more and more to what's being called "pushing our borders out" – that is, looking more and more at points of origin as the place to begin the process of clearing, certifying and then tracking movement to the United States.

The next critical element is seriously working at segmenting the populations of people that are coming here. Chuck used, I think, slightly different language for this, but it is to really understand what the nature of the movement is, what is high risk, what is low risk and law abiding. The work that the Dialogue has done in analyzing that movement in the San Diego area is absolutely invaluable, and is the raw material of being able to come up with strategies for segmenting the traveling population.

Next, of course, is biometrics. More and more, in fact, is available to us through biometrics. And biometrics, of course, we've thought about in the past as the sorts of thing that would identify criminals. The way INS has used biometrics very successfully has been to match databases of people that may have committed crimes, etc. That's being turned on its head now. We are increasingly going to be asking for biometrics from those of us in the law abiding public, in order to facilitate our being able to carry on our normal lives in the ways that we want to carry them on.

The next element is indeed active, robust partnerships between the public sector and the private sector and the civic sectors in all of our major communities. Because these are issues now where government alone cannot do it and we should not be asking government to do it alone. Government must take the lead. Government must be the

force that we rally around, but government has to be able to rely on a whole range of actors in the society in true partnerships.

The next element is indeed to press forward on integration, to press ahead on greater interdependence even though that is also a vulnerability. But in the case of North America, for instance, the move to greater integration among the economies of Mexico, the United States, and Canada will ultimately become a saving grace for us because it will lead to a secure North American space. And that is the paradigm for both prosperity and security that we need to be shaping and need to be forming for the future.

"We are increasingly going to be asking biometrics from the law-abiding public."

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How SENTRI Works to Improve Border Security

SENTRI stands for Secure Electronic Network for Travelers' Rapid Inspection. It was designed by a team of federal law enforcement experts for use by low risk local residents who cross the border frequently and are therefore willing to subject themselves to investigation in order to receive pre-clearance.

Individuals who register for SENTRI must be residents of the greater San Diego/Tijuana metropolitan area, with family, jobs and economic interests in the region. They are fingerprinted and undergo criminal background checks more rigorous than any they routinely face at a port of entry.

When an approved international traveler approaches the border in one of the special SENTRI lanes, the system automatically identifies the vehicle and validates the identity of its occupants using the following: (1) data maintained in a SENTRI enrollment system computer (which includes digitalized photographs of the vehicle's occupants); (2) data accessed by a magnetic stripe reader and the border crosser's Port Pass Identification Number; (3) an inspector's visual comparison of the vehicle and its passengers with the data on a computer screen.

Simultaneously, automatic digital license plate readers and com-

puters perform queries of the vehicle and its occupants against law enforcement databases that are continuously updated. A combination of electric gates, tire shredders, traffic control lights, fixed iron bollards, and pop-up pneumatic bollards ensure physical control of the border crossers and their vehicles.

Participants in the program wait no longer than three minutes to enter the United States, even at the busiest time of day. Critical information required in the inspection process is provided to the inspector in advance of the passenger's arrival, thus reducing the inspection time to an average of 10 seconds.

Under the leadership of then San Diego Congresswoman Lynn Schenk in 1994, the U.S. Congress first approved the implementation of the SENTRI lane program for Otay Mesa. Operation began the following year. The success of this pilot program led to the decision to expand the service to other U.S.-Mexico land ports of entry, most notably in El Paso, Texas, and modified versions have been implemented at the border with Canada in Buffalo and Detroit. The SENTRI Program began operating at the San Ysidro port of entry in September of 2000.

Meissner's Message:

THE CRITICAL INGREDIENTS TO MOVE AHEAD ARE ALREADY IN PLACE IN SAN DIEGO

You in San Diego have the opportunity and, in my opinion, the obligation to become once more the national leader in demonstrating how this new reality can be made to work. And the reason that I think San Diego has this opportunity, and the reason that I think that it is tantamount to an obligation, is because basically all of the critical ingredients, certainly most of the critical ingredients to move ahead are, in fact, in place here

You have established control of the border between the ports of entry. There is a real track record of success here for facilitation and strengthened enforcement existing side by side. There is a tradition of trust between the federal agencies and the community and the extension of that within the region between U.S. officials and Mexican officials. There are many organizations that want to pitch in and help and the size of the audience in this room is the best evidence that I can imagine for that. And you have people who have been intermediaries in the past who are willing, anxious, and able to do so again. And those are the catalysts that need to move forward.

And finally, you do have this state of the art technology that is known as SENTRI. You have local buy-in for that. It does not require a sales job. Obviously demand far exceeds the ability to meet the demand at this time, and that was a very, very hard won victory. I don't know how many of you remember, but you had members of Congress, particularly Lynn Schenk, who had to really, really fight an uphill battle. The administration helped as much as possible but it really was uphill, to get legislative authority to even try commuter lanes on the southwest border because it was considered to be...Well, people just weren't thinking creatively about it. And so that authority is in place. Those technologies exist here and that, it seems to me, is where to focus in order to begin an effort at really moving to a new future.

What I would urge is a concerted effort that is based on a public/private partnership to develop, for want of another term, a very robust "safe crossers program" in the San Diego region by making absolutely fullest use of the commuter lane capacity that you have here. The SENTRI program was originally marketed as a program for facilitation, and indeed it is a program for facilitation. But fundamentally it is the best tool that is available and operational today to ensure border security. Because it takes away the guesswork. It basically moves the vast majority of people who are lawful and law-abiding, and allows the resources to be focused on the people who could be questionable, the people that are first time crossers,

the people who are high risk. And that's what we need our previous enforcement resources to be doing.

Wave of the Future

The SENTRI lanes really represent the wave of the future in this new era. You're holding in your hands in this region two of the three that exist on the southwest border. It is an enormously precious commodity. So what it's going to take is, as I said, a very robust public/private partnership. That's a partnership that in my view ought to sit down and just lay out what are the achievable goals and develop an action plan to get there. That action plan's going to have to address some difficult issues. There are issues of cost and it seems to me some

real creativity is in order. I can imagine employers subsidizing employees in order to meet the costs. I can imagine students coming across the border as a very important target audience. Those who can't afford it, maybe there's some kind of community fund raising or grant making that can be directed to that. There are clearly issues with the application process that sound to be ripe for what we used to call business process re-engineering. And then when those kind of issues are addressed collaboratively

and there is consensus on how to move forward, then it's times for public information and real outreach in order to get things moving in a much more aggressive way. And what that then becomes is not simply the full use of the capabilities that already are here. It becomes the

bedrock for more long-term planning and for broad-based advocacy on other things that are going to be coming down the road in the future.

So let me try to summarize my message here. My message here is that San Diego is unique right now. Because of its size, because of its track record, because of the degree of integration and interdependence within the region. There is great potential for San Diego taking leadership

once again in addressing and, I believe, being able to resolve what is one of the central dilemmas and problems of this new era that we're in. And I think that what we will all find and what will be very, very satisfying and important to learn and to reinforce is that true, lasting security cannot be achieved, it's not about erecting barriers and about shutting down. True and lasting security is about taking the steps that are necessary to remain an open, prosperous, free society that is increasingly engaged in the world that is all around us. Thank you very much. Thanks for your attention and thanks for your friendship.

"I would urge a concerted effort, based on a public/private partnership, to develop a very robust 'safe crossers program' in the San Diego region by making absolutely fullest use of the commuter lane capacity that you have here."

"You in San Diego have the opportunity and, in my opinion, the obligation to become once more the national leader in demonstrating how his new reality can be made to work."

EXPANDING SENTRI TO ALL FREQUENT CROSSERS IS AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

The SENTRI Program is currently expanding at a rate too slow to have any major impact on improving security and facilitation at the border. The program has only 12,000 enrollees after opening at Otay Mesa in 1995 and at San Ysidro in the fall of 2000. At San Ysidro, SENTRI participants account for approximately 50,000 vehicle crossings per month, which is a very small proportion – less than 4% – of the million and a quarter vehicles that on average cross the border at San Ysidro every month.

SENTRI is not at present staffed or organized for rapid expansion. The program has never really been marketed. It has a wait list 6,000 long. The cumbersome registration process can take six months or longer, and the cost of \$129 a year also acts as a significant deterrent for many potential users.

But if SENTRI were staffed and smartly reorganized for rapid expansion, how big could it grow? And how much impact might it then have on border security and facilitation?

A key idea behind the origins of SENTRI is that frequent border crossers who are employed residents of the region would be relatively low risk and would have a high incentive to enroll in the program if they were guaranteed very rapid crossings of three minutes or less. This idea grew out of a 1994 San Diego Dialogue study, *Who Crosses the Border*, which revealed for the first time the significance of frequent crossers at the San Diego ports of entry. (See chart, this page.) Their significance can be seen as follows:

The total number of people who cross the border at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa is only about a tenth of the number of total crossings registered at these ports of entry every month. If current crossings stand at an average of around 5.2 million people a month, this means that the total number of crossers could be as few as 520,000. The reason is that frequent crossers (4 to 19 times a month) and very frequent crossers (20 or more times a month) make 96% of all crossings but account for only 60% of the crossers.

Frequent and very frequent crossers together totaled 313,000 individuals at the time of the study. This number was considered the potential pool of SENTRI enrollees.

The study also showed that:

- 41% of all crossers are American citizens who either travel to Mexico temporarily or are residents of that country;
- Only 4% of the crossings – approximately 208,000 a month, or 6,933 a day – correspond to occasional, first time or low frequency crossers (1 to 3 times a month) who might require heightened surveillance at the ports of entry.

Obviously, if it was possible to enroll all or even most of the 313,000 frequent crossers in the region – meaning that they met all the requirements of SENTRI, including the criminal background check – the impact on the daily operations of the ports of entry would be profound. The number of thorough inspections needed at the gates would be dramatically reduced, and the scarce resources of the border-inspection agencies could then be more efficiently employed by concentrating on the high-risk travelers.

Border crossers at San Diego land ports of entry by frequency

Type of crosser	% total crossers	Number of crossers	% total crossings
Frequent crossers (4-19 times/month)	34.9%	182,000	96%
Very frequent (20 or more/month)	25.1%	131,000	
First time	17.3%	90,000	4%
Occasional (under one/month)	8.8%	46,000	
Low frequency (1-3 times/month)	13.8%	72,000	
TOTAL	100%	521,000	100%

Source: San Diego Dialogue, *Who Crosses The Border*, 1994

How then might SENTRI be geared up for rapid expansion? As Doris Meissner suggested at the Forum Fronterizo in December, the best place to begin would be the creation of a partnership between the federal inspection agencies and the local community to develop an action plan, including ideas about possible community subsidies for the SENTRI fee.

The partnership could be accomplished simply by re-establishing the San Diego Ports of Entry Advisory Council, which the Dialogue used to convene regularly in the mid-1990s with the collaboration and active participation of INS, U.S. Customs, and the U.S. Attorney for San Diego and Imperial Counties.

Frequent and very frequent border crossers account for 96% percent of all crossings... Scarce inspection resources could be more efficiently employed by concentrating on high-risk travelers.

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San Diego Dialogue's Cross-Border Economic Bulletin

ARE WAGES REALLY LOWER IN SAN DIEGO?



Dr. Jim Gerber, professor of economics at San Diego State University and San Diego Dialogue's Economic Research Fellow, writes the Cross-Border Economic Bulletin

Local conventional wisdom is that San Diego is such a nice place to live that employers can pay below average wages and still find plenty of well-qualified employees. The Union Tribune, for example, has done a number of stories in this vein. (See August, 26, 2001, for a recent example.)

Wages seem low, but how much of a wage discount do residents take in return for the opportunity to live in the region and enjoy its many amenities? This issue of the Cross Border Economic Bulletin examines some of the quantitative evidence of lower wages in San Diego. Its main findings are:

- Nominal wages (i.e., not adjusted for cost of living) are higher in San Diego than average U.S. urban wages;
- Living costs are higher in San Diego than the average U.S. urban areas;
- Urban coastal areas to the north (e.g. San Francisco) have higher living costs than San Diego;
- Real wages (i.e., adjusted for the cost of living) are lower in San Diego than in the rest of the nation, but higher than in the greater Los Angeles area and the San Francisco Bay Area;
- Wages increased significantly from 1999 to 2000, but with the exception of blue collar occupations, wage increases were less than the regional rate of inflation.

Wages vary by occupation, not industry

Americans often worry that good jobs are losing out to bad jobs, that high paying manufacturing jobs are being replaced by low wage, service sector jobs. While it is usually true that workers take large pay cuts when they are forced to change industries, it is also true that a person's wages are mostly determined by their skills and occupation, not by their industry. Fast food corporations may hire a lot of unskilled workers, but they also hire computer programmers, lawyers, executives, and so forth.

Table 1 makes this point. Executives and janitors work in the same industry, but the former make a higher wage due to the complexity and skill requirements of their work. At the same time, executives in manufacturing do not necessarily make more than executives in the fast food industry or some other service oriented sector. Table 1 lists the average San Diego wage during 2000 for 15 occupational categories. Wages include hourly earnings and salaries paid to employees, including incentive bonuses, cost of living adjustments, and hazard duty pay. They do not include overtime pay, or benefits. Each of the 15 categories in Table 1 is an average of many subcategories, with 480 occupational subcategories measured in total.

Table 1

Wages in San Diego, full time workers, 2000

All	\$19.07
Professional specialty	32.52
Technical	19.47
Executives, administrators, and managers	39.91
Management related	24.54
Sales	15.86
Administrative support, including clerical	13.63
Precision production, craft, and repair	17.55
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors	10.97
Transportation and material moving	14.34
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers	11.95
Protective service	17.45
Food service	8.25
Health service	10.18
Cleaning and building service	8.27
Personal service	8.33

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Compensation Survey, 2000.

Regional comparisons

Table 2 shrinks the number of categories in order to show a comparison of three major California urban areas and the United States urban average. Table 2 shows that California urban areas have higher wages than the average US urban area, and that San Diego is similar to the Los Angeles-Orange County-Riverside County region, but below San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose.

Table 2

Wages in the US and California major urban areas, full time workers, 2000

	San Diego	LA-Orange Riverside	SF-Oakland San Jose	US
All	\$19.07	\$19.06	\$23.12	\$16.66
White collar	23.49	23.58	27.23	20.26
Blue collar	14.56	13.81	16.80	13.69
Services	10.99	12.64	15.14	10.56

Source: See Table 1

Judging by Table 2, workers in San Diego receive higher than (U.S.) average wages, but common sense tells us that money wages are only part of the story. Looking at similar paying jobs across regions, differences in living costs can dramatically alter the basket of goods and services one can buy. For example, within California, the cost of living varies greatly across cities (Table 3). In Fresno or Riverside, living costs are about 6% higher than in a sample of over 300 U.S. urban areas, while in San Francisco, they are almost 100% higher. Living costs in San Diego are estimated to be about 27% higher than the national average.

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Table 3
Living costs around California, 2000

City Index, US* =	100
Fresno	106.0
San Bernardino	112.7
Los Angeles-Long Beach	144.7
Sacramento	118.8
Oakland	132.6
San Diego`	127.3
Riverside	106.6
San Francisco	199.2

Source: American Chamber of Commerce Research Associates (ACCRA).

*An average of more than 300 metropolitan areas in the ACCRA quarterly survey.

The living cost comparisons of Table 3 can be used to estimate price adjusted real wages in major California and average United States urban areas. Table 4 deflates California wages by the weighted average of the living costs in the combined metropolitan areas (LA-Orange-Riverside, and SF-Oakland-San Jose). It shows that real wages in San Diego are above the other major metropolitan areas of California, but below the U.S. urban average. Apparently, there is a wage penalty to working in San Diego, but it is less severe than in other areas of the state.

Table 4
Real wages in major California urban areas, full time workers, 2000

	San Diego	LA-Orange Riverside	SF-Oakland San Jose	US*
All	14.98	13.53	13.94	16.66
White collar	18.45	16.74	16.41	20.26
Blue collar	11.44	9.80	10.13	13.69
Services	8.63	8.97	9.13	10.56

Sources: Tables 2 and 3.

The wage penalty is most severe for service sector workers (22% less), followed by blue collar workers (20%) and white collar workers (10%). Overall, for all occupational categories combined, the San Diego discount is over 11%. This is a lot, but considerably less than the LA discount (23%) or the San Francisco Bay Area discount (19.5%).

Do wages differences compensate for regional amenities?

Some economists argue that after wages are adjusted for the local cost of living, the wage difference between regions reflects the value of environmental and social amenities. That is, if San Diego's cost-of-living-adjusted wages are below the national average, it's because it is such a wonderful place to live. As more and more people crowd into the region, wages fall and living costs rise (due to congestion) until the advantages of local amenities no longer compensate for the lower wages and higher costs.

If we compare the real wages in Table 4 to a much poorer region of the country—say Brownsville on the Texas-Mexico border—we discover that real, cost-of-living adjusted wages are lower there. According to the above theory of wage differentials, Brownsville must have more amenities than San Francisco which must have more than San Diego. This is nonsensical, however, and is probably explained by the mismeasurement of wages. Specifically, within a given occupational category, the complexities and skill levels of Brownsville occupations are probably somewhat less than in San Diego or San Francisco.

Strong wage gains offset by cost-of-living increases

San Diego has experienced four years of an extraordinarily strong labor market, with unemployment rates well below 4% and at times below 3%. The net result was a labor shortage that pushed up wages rapidly, particularly in the last year (1999-2000). Higher wages coupled with the influx of new residents contributed to a strong growth in expenditures, but the supply of goods and services was somewhat sluggish, particularly for goods such as new housing. As a consequence, local price increases were nearly as great as the wage increases.

Table 5 illustrates the wage and price increases in San Diego between 1999 and 2000. By definition, real wages increases are equal to the difference between the nominal wage increase (6.77%) and inflation (5.79%). In other words, average wages rose about 1%. The real wage increase was not uniform across occupational categories, however, with blue collar workers making significant gains and white collar workers losing ground in spite of nearly a 5% average wage increase.

In sum, San Diego's wage discount is real, although it is a general problem within the coastal areas of California, and not just a local fact of life. The discount is created through rising regional costs, in part propelled by the limited supply of housing and other goods and services which cannot keep up with growing regional demands.

Table 5
Inflation and wage increases in San Diego, 1999-2000

Inflation	5.79%
Wage increases	
All occupations	6.77%
White collar	4.96%
Blue collar	8.66%
Service	5.27%

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index and National Compensation Survey, 2000.

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BORDER SOLUTION IN OUR HANDS, AND MEDIA'S

"The SENTRI lanes," she went on, "really represent the wave of the future in this new era. You're holding in your hands in this region two of the three that exist on the southwest border. It is an enormously precious commodity."

The challenge, she said, would be to expand SENTRI from the 12,000 area residents who are currently enrolled to half or more of the three hundred thousand frequent crossers in the region who are potential enrollees. That would both improve security and dramatically reduce wait times for the low-risk residents of the region.

This is good, front page stuff, especially when you understand that Meissner was disagreeing implicitly with the current policy out of Washington that requires thorough inspection of everyone and every vehicle. But Meissner's message never made it close to a front page.

Suppose an enterprising editor in town wanted to bring her message back to life. Here are some story assignments that should have a high payoff for our region and the nation:

1. Ask security experts around the country if they think Meissner is right. Her main point – that you get better security by segmenting the traffic between high-risk and low-risk than by treating everyone the same – ought to get widespread validation. The same principle could be applied broadly at airports through an expansion of already existing pre-clearance programs. Several high-ranking officials within INS and the U.S. Customs Service have told me they also think segmentation is the way to go, but they are reluctant to be vocal about it.

2. Take a hard look at the SENTRI program. Is it working as a tool of law enforcement and traffic management, and how might it be

improved? In particular, why is it still taking applicants six months or more to enroll? What would have to change to expedite expansion to 150,000 or more users?

3. Put the San Diego congressional delegation, along with Senators Boxer and Feinstein, on the spot. Ask them if they will work together to support a major expansion of the SENTRI program. So far, Bob Filner seems to be the only member of the delegation who has taken much interest in the border-crossing problem, but the recent redistricting may even dilute his interest. In any case, a bipartisan effort is needed. The first two stories should provide plenty of evidence to justify such an effort.

4. Put Mayor Dick Murphy on the spot. Ask him why he has done nothing apparent to orchestrate a solution to a problem that is causing great distress to tens of thousands of San Diego residents and a great many businesses. Ask him also if he would be willing to galvanize leadership in San Diego to lobby Washington for an expansion of SENTRI. If not, we ought to know why.

5. Don't forget Mexico. Baja California Governor Eugenio Elorduy and Tijuana Mayor Jesus Gonzalez Reyes have a big stake in solving a problem that is causing as much pain south of the border as north. Gov. Elorduy, who is co-chair of Forum Fronterizo, has already spoken to Pres. Fox about the problem and is said to be in the process of planning a trip to Washington on behalf of an expansion of SENTRI.

This is a test, folks. Doris Meissner thinks San Diego is obliged to lead the nation to a solution on border security. Let's see if we can rise to the challenge.