

Imperial Valley Press

THE SOURCE FOR NEWS

March 24, 2011

50 CENTS

GATEWAY TO IMPERIAL COUNTY

Border future brighter

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Calexico's Ad-Hoc Committee on Border Issues and U.S. Rep. Bob Filner, D-Chula Vista, felt positive after meeting with the new area head of border protection Wednesday.

Chris Maston stepped into the position of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, San Diego field operations director March 13.

"He's different than we've had; very open and straightforward," committee chairman Carlton Hargrave said.

Maston previously held port director positions at the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa passenger ports of entry.

In his 26 years of law enforcement experience, he was also a customs inspector at the Calexico port of entry at one point.

"I am committed to this

agency's important mission: securing the border of our nation," Maston said in a prepared statement. "At our ports of entry, this means segmenting low-risk travelers and commodities for faster processing, leveraging our intelligence to detect high-risk people and items, and working with our partners to ensure that when we interdict illegal activity, the persons responsible faces consequences for their actions."

Committee members said they were impressed he had worked the Calexico port of entry booths before and therefore had hands-on experience in the situation.

While getting to know one another, ideas on how to cut down on border-crossing wait times were tossed around.

One idea included a directional board at the ports of entry that would give people estimated wait times for the pedestrian, privately-owned-vehicle and SENTRI lanes. Then, people could make an educated decision about which one to enter and hopefully cut down on wait times.

"We're going to keep working on more efficiency, more technology," Filner said. "Where we can help, we don't know unless we have meetings like this."

Overall, the committee members said they felt good about future cooperation between the community and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

"This committee was very pleased with the meeting," Hargrave said. "We feel we'll have a good relationship going forward."