

OPINION

Common sense shot dead at the border

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It's nasty business, reconciling building a wall on the Mexican border with the Statue of Liberty's engraved invitation, asking for globe's huddled masses of the weary and impoverished.

History and hypocrisy have collided, a head-on at Juarez and Laredo and all along the border.

American government in recent years seems to have fallen prey to historical amnesia. It was not so long ago that an American president, quoting the mayor of West Berlin, said that the Berlin Wall was "an offense not only against history, but an offense against humanity, dividing husbands and wives and brothers and sisters, and dividing a people who wish to be together."

Some 20 years after President Kennedy's words at the Brandenburg Gate, President Ronald Reagan challenged the symbol of the failure of the Soviet system.

"Mr. Gorbachev," he said to the Soviet leader, "tear down that wall."

And now, our leaders want to build a wall to keep illegal immigrants out, while in the same breath advocating "guest worker programs."

Is it still true that we are a government of laws and not of men or fences or political expediency?

To rely on walls, and high-tech surveillance equipment -- 1,000 of the motion sensors placed along the border failed within three months, drone aircraft have crashed.

Meanwhile, with all the rhetoric and billions spent on technology, the U.S. Border Patrol remains woefully underfunded and understaffed, with not enough agents to patrol the border.

That means not enough agents to enforce the foundation of our government, the law.

According to a CNN report, when the government wanted to talk about securing our borders, it went, not to the agents on the ground who battle the problem every day, but to defense contractors. That translates to bells and whistles that are good for show, but little else, except costing taxpayers billions.

And it sounds painfully familiar to the refrain heard in the Hurricane Katrina rebuilding contracts.

If you want to secure the border, give the Border Patrol the resources it needs. The tallest wall in the world can't enforce the law, especially if a man, woman, or child is hungry enough. The Soviets learned that lesson the hard way.

The bottom line is that all this talk of guest worker programs, which would allow a chance at citizenship to the 10 to 12 million illegals currently in this country, which sends the wrong message that it's all right to break the law, is about power politics, pure and simple.

Illegals are flocking into Texas and California, two big states with big blocs of delegate and electoral votes. If you think the 2008 election isn't a factor in some of the thinking going on in the Beltway, I've got a FEMA trailer that was

only lived in on Sundays for sale.

But if we are indeed a government of laws, enforce them. And remember that no doubt, al-Qaida is watching.

But those who suggest building a fence, or a wall along the Mexican border, should remember history and the mixed message a wall sends to the planet's oppressed. And remember too that those hungry for economic or political freedom won't be deterred by a wall, or a fence, or miles of open sea. Ask the Vietnamese boat people of the 1970s, or the Cubans fleeing Castro in the late 1950s.

Consider, 260 people were shot in that no man's land around the Berlin Wall between 1961 and 1989. The love of freedom and the love of family are powerful forces no politician can quell.

And as for the Mexican people who want to come to America, let them do as their predecessors from across the planet have done: Come here legally. Learn the language. Learn our culture, without sacrificing your own. And obey the law.

Building a wall is not the answer. Beefing up the border -- and with more than 6,000 National Guard troops -- is.

Because forgotten in this debate are the men and women of the U.S Border Patrol.

In the 7,000 miles south of San Diego -- according to the Christian Science Monitor the sector that requires the most manpower -- the Border Patrol suffers from heavy attrition, losing 30 of its 1,900 personnel monthly.

Arrests at the border have dropped from nearly 1.7 million in 2000 to 931,557 last year.

"The most difficult thing about being an agent now is that nothing we seem to do is supported," senior patrol agent Thane Gallagher, health and safety director for National Border Patrol Council Local 1613 told the Christian Science Monitor. "America loves illegal immigrants but hates illegal immigration," he said..

As they battle increasing numbers of lawbreakers -- and make no mistake, illegals are just that, illegal -- morale on the front line of Homeland Security plummets.

"I risk my life every day dealing with people who would just as soon see us dead than submit to an arrest, and now we have the administration saying, We're going to legalize them anyway," Gallagher told the Monitor. "You have no idea what this does to us.

We live in a world far different from the one John Kennedy, or even Ronald Reagan knew. And while poor Mexicans battle the oppression of poverty, they live in a republic, not a totalitarian regime as the Berliners and Cubans and Vietnamese did at other times in our history.

By choosing hypocrisy over history, we move closer to becoming a government of men and walls, not of law.

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