

## THE NATION

### **GOP Hopes High for New Border Efforts**

**Proposals include hiring more agents and getting employers to stop using illegal immigrants, but some say a guest-worker program is crucial.**

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WASHINGTON — After decades of government failure to stem the tide of illegal immigration, the Bush administration and congressional Republicans are putting forward ambitious enforcement programs they say will finally lead to effective control over the nation's borders.

To achieve that long-sought goal, they are counting on adding hundreds of Border Patrol and other immigration agents, aided by more technology — infrared cameras, sensors that distinguish between humans and animals, a new surveillance drone that can tell whether a furtive figure has a gun or just a pack of cigarettes.

There are also plans for accelerated processing of detainees, expanded holding facilities and some new carrots and sticks to persuade employers not to hire illegal immigrants.

Similar grand designs were unveiled in 1986, 1994 and 1996. All ended in failure. So why would the new initiatives fare any better?

Some supporters say the new resources would give the enforcement effort critical mass: enough resources to end the pattern of cracking down in one place only to see the flow of illegal immigrants move elsewhere.

And some Republicans are making enforcement a precondition for considering other revamping efforts, including the Bush administration's proposed guest-worker program to give more immigrants some kind of legal status. Faced with congressional intransigence, the administration has decided to put enforcement first, even though top officials say it cannot succeed without a guest-worker system.

The likelihood of this drive succeeding is viewed with skepticism, especially among officials in border communities. Some welcome promises of new aid but say they don't see how this effort is going to do better than its predecessors.

At a time of deep concern over national security, the U.S. has the largest population of undocumented immigrants in its history.

"Everything is about the border, about controlling the border, but that will never happen," Ray Borane, mayor of Douglas, Ariz., says of Washington's immigration reform efforts. "It's a myopic view. The border is only ... one piece of the puzzle. Washington also has to focus on where [immigrants] are going and what they're doing when they get there."

What the vast majority are doing is feeding the U.S. economy's seeming insatiable appetite for immigrant workers. They are so vital to the economy that sending them home in a giant law enforcement crackdown is unthinkable — as well as impossible — government officials and outside experts say.

Nonetheless, the administration and Congress are pressing ahead on enforcement.

Near the top of many of the proposals is investment in infrastructure designed to make it harder for immigrants to bypass border checkpoints.

In the House, a newly passed immigration bill requires fencing, including lights and cameras, at certain points along the border. Extensive wall and fence systems have been erected in parts of California and Texas.

Chris Bauder, president of the National Border Patrol Council Local 1613, which represents San Diego agents, says

his city's experience shows walls don't work. The fence in San Diego "just pushed that traffic elsewhere, and that's what a 2,000-mile fence will do: push it to ports of entry, to the coast, to the Canadian border, where we don't have anything."

"They're treating the symptoms," he says, "not the root cause" — the U.S. jobs magnet.

The House bill mandates other infrastructure such as checkpoints and all-weather roads, while the administration's plans include vehicle barriers and stadium lighting, plus expanded detention facilities.

Officials such as Ron Colburn, chief border agent in Arizona's Yuma sector, welcome the technology. His station, among the country's busiest, will soon get ground-sensing radar, more infrared and daylight cameras, and digital wireless communications, which he is particularly excited about. Today, border agents often have to use personal cellphones to communicate from remote areas.

Colburn is using the Predator B unmanned aerial vehicle. "I was a skeptic, but now I'm sold," he says of the technology.

Others offer caveats. "The one drone is \$14 million," T.J. Bonner, president of the National Border Patrol Council, says of the Predator. "That's a lot of money for one eye in the sky.... Piloted aircraft are more effective."

Yuma County Sheriff Ralph E. Ogden, whose area borders two Mexican states and California, has a more basic concern. "Technology can show you a picture of someone," he says, "but someone still has to go out to get them. It's a great supplement, but no replacement for real people."

When it comes to manpower, Congress has agreed to funding for an additional 1,700 border agents this year, raising the total to about 11,000. Originally, President Bush's 2006 budget had allowed for an extra 210 agents.

The House legislation would require the military and the Department of Homeland Security to develop a plan to use more military surveillance equipment along the border.

The House measure would also allow local sheriffs within 25 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border to detain illegal immigrants and transfer them to federal authorities in the routine course of duty. Tony Estrada, sheriff of Arizona's Santa Cruz County, which shares 50 miles of border with Mexico, says his department doesn't have the time.

"I do not want to be doing immigration work, and I don't want my people to do it," he says. "We don't have the resources."

Estrada cautions that the number of new border agents can be misleading. "When you get 500, that isn't indicative of what you have in the field, because you have shifts to deal with, people out sick, detailed to other areas," he says. "When you get right down to it, it's a thin blue line out there."

No one working on the border seems to think the number of agents is anywhere near adequate. Colburn recalls former border czar Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey suggesting that complete border security would require 20,000 agents. "I remember thinking, 'Wow, I don't think so,' but now, 10 years later, that seems like a reasonable number," Colburn says.

Whatever new resources are deployed along the border, most experts agree that achieving control requires more enforcement in the interior of the country. Some say mandatory employee verification and increased penalties on employers who hire illegally, as required in the House legislation, are needed.

They say this has never seriously been tried, though employer enforcement was part of a 1986 law. In fiscal 2004, the Department of Homeland Security issued three notices of intent to fine employers. None was fined.

Bauder says that if employers were robustly targeted, illegal immigrants would leave, word-of-mouth would trickle back to Mexico and fewer immigrants would try to come.

But absent a guest-worker program, many say, pressure from business would probably counter any move toward

effective internal enforcement.

"Every commission that studied this came to the same conclusion, that you have to eliminate the jobs magnet if you want to eliminate illegal immigration," Bonner says.