



## Friends Of The Border Patrol

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### **Where are my cheese and crackers, a border profile**

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IN EASTERN AND CENTRAL ARIZONA the border between the United States and Mexico runs in a straight surveyor's line through mile after mile of scrubland. It is a vast and empty terrain punctuated by barren mountains that rise sharply above the desert. The international line is marked only by 19th century obelisks of concrete or iron, standing just a few feet high in the desert brush, spaced at intervals of 0.14 to 4.91 miles. The only indication of the border between the markers is a fence strung by ranchers to keep cattle from straying and a rough dirt road that runs beside it.

By day the countryside is quiet. Dust devils occasionally swirl upward and spin furiously across the creosote plain, and tumble weeds lifted by sudden gusts of wind sometimes sail over the border fence and bounce on the dirt road before bumping into the cactus and desert brush on the other side.

But when the sun sets, the quiet landscape comes alive. Groups of migrants emerge from the mesquite and the arroyos where they have hidden all day to avoid detection from aircraft. They put on their backpacks and pick up their water bottles, then head north. Many walk only as far as pre-arranged points along a country road where smugglers pick them up, sometimes in stolen or hijacked vehicles, then race at high speeds in the dark with their lights off.

Many others walk for miles into the interior where they can continue in comfort to their final destination, which may be anywhere within the United States, for once beyond the border American authorities have no further interest in them. All along the way on the U.S. side of the border one sees trash of all kinds littering the route of this vast migration.

Dave Stoddard lives just north of the border near the San Pedro River, the route the Spanish explorer Coronado used in 1540 when he entered what would 308 years later become a part of the United States. Today it is one of the many routes of mass migration northward.

Stoddard says that Americans living near the border and those who live in the interior along the favorite routes of migration complain of a constant crowd hurrying past their homes all night long, especially between 1:00 and 3:00 in the morning. Residents have put locks on their houses, their barns, and their out-buildings. They have built fences and installed motion sensor lights, and have posted guard dogs that bark all night long

in order to gain a sense of uneasy security. For with a massive uncontrolled migration passing by your back door night after night you never know who will come to rob and assault you, especially since desperate men transporting drugs sometimes travel with the passing migrants.

Husbands and wives cannot go out for an evening together unless they have someone to watch the house while they're gone, and since the distances are great in the borderlands -- the minimum time of response for a 911 call to the sheriff is around 30 minutes -- everyone is armed. Men wear sidearms at work and mothers put handguns in their purses when they walk their children to the school bus. The elderly say they feel like prisoners in their own homes.

Then on the first of April 2005 the migration came to a sudden halt. From the town of Douglas to the tiny settlement of Naco, and from there all the way to the other side of the San Pedro River some 40 miles to the west, the nocturnal movement ceased. Dogs no longer barked all night long, and people said they had not slept so well in years.

The reason: the presence of a small group of civilian volunteers called the Minutemen who mounted a month-long vigil to demonstrate that, with proper vigilance, the stream of illegal migration could indeed be stopped. The project, organized by Chris Simcox of Tombstone, Arizona, and James Gilchrist of Southern California, was based on the neighborhood watch model, a civilian association whose function, according to the Neighborhood Watch Institute, is to provide "eyes and ears for law enforcement."

If any law enforcement agency needs this kind of help it is the United States Border Patrol. Since March 2003 the Border Patrol has been a part of the Department of Homeland Security with the revised mission of preventing terrorists and terrorist material from crossing the border -- this on top of its already demanding mission of interdicting drug smuggling and the control of illegal immigration, tasks made all but impossible by the massive stream of illegal migration pouring across the border.

Border Patrol union president T. J. Bonner, of the National Border Patrol Council, rightly observes: "Even if a terrorist is one-in-a-million occurrence, with several million people coming into the country each year, very soon they reach that critical mass necessary to carry out another attack on the magnitude of September 11. This is totally unacceptable from the standpoint of homeland security and national security. We should gain control of our borders."

After 9/11 George Bush called for public participation in homeland security. Yet when asked about the Minuteman Project, President Bush bristled, calling the volunteers "vigilantes." Though poll after poll reveals that the public wants the government to bring illegal immigration under control, the President is content to keep things just the way they are since it creates the de facto amnesty he has promised Mexican president Vicente Fox and that he has been unable to pass through Congress.

The "eyes and ears" of citizens on the border is the last thing Bush and the Mexican

government want. The Mexican elite regard the massive exodus from Mexico as a safety-valve that protects their own privileged position; as a cash cow for Mexico in the form of remittances to the tune of \$14 billion each year, the second largest source of income for Mexico after oil; and as a potential means for manipulating the American political system (as frankly revealed by such Mexican leaders as former President Ernesto Zedillo and former national security advisor and later U.N. ambassador Adolfo Aquilar Zinser).

In order to avoid unwanted publicity, the Border Patrol assigned 500 more agents for quick response to reports from Minutemen of illegal movement. The Mexican government likewise dispatched police, as well as Mexican army troops, by one estimate 1,600 strong, to their side of the border to dampen potentially damaging publicity because of the presence of observers on the American side of the line. Soldiers interdicted would-be border crossers, loaded them into trucks, and transported them to points along the border where they could cross illegally into the United States beyond the eyes and ears of the Minutemen.

#### THE CONSEQUENCES OF MASS MIGRATION

Americans are becoming increasingly resentful of the government's refusal to do anything about illegal immigration. Americans do not resent the migrants themselves. On the whole Americans regard them as industrious, good-hearted people looking for a way to better their lives and those of their family by hard work. Many Americans, especially those who live along the border, admire their perseverance, saying that in their place they would do the same.

But breaking the law is not the best way to start a new life in a country that claims to be based on the rule of law. There is also a darker undercurrent within the uncontrolled stream of illegal immigrants -- the influx of hardened criminals who come to commit crime. "As long as our borders remain porous, they are just as open to criminals and terrorists as they are to illegal aliens," says T.J. Bonner.

Illegal aliens are some of the most violent criminals in the United States today. In an article in the City Journal, Heather Mac Donald reports that illegal aliens account for 95 percent of all outstanding warrants for homicide (out of a total of 1,200 to 1,500). This figure is up by two-thirds for all felony warrants (17,000). Illegal immigration also feeds the growing membership of violent gangs.

The public is also becoming increasingly aware of the cost to taxpayers of supporting high levels of illegal immigration. Harvard economist George Borjas, in his book *Heaven's Door*, says that today's immigrants, of which a major percentage are illegal, possess fewer skills and are more dependent on public assistance than their predecessors, and that their children, unlike the children of previous waves of immigrants, are less likely to follow the upwardly mobile tract. He writes that they are more likely to remain poor and live in segregated communities.

Moreover, he says, the inexhaustible influx of cheap, exploitable labor adds little to the

overall economy. He calculates that the net annual gain, as of 1999, was only about \$8 billion per year. Yet by dragging down wages for those native born at the lower end of the economic scale, Borjas estimates that some \$160 million per year is shifted away from workers and toward employers and consumers of public services.

Taxes paid by immigrants as a group are low due to their disproportionately low-skill status and thus their low level of income, while their consumption of tax-supported services are high due to their high fertility and poverty rates, factors made far more significant by the large proportion of illegal immigrants among them.

Recently the National Research Council estimated that the total cost to the taxpayer of illegal immigration, which is carried mainly by local and state governments, is \$11 to \$22 billion a year for education, criminal justice, and medical care. Once a child is born to illegal aliens, the child is eligible for welfare since people born in the United States are American citizens. Illegal residents who have such "anchor babies" can tap into the welfare system, thus adding to the total bill the taxpayer picks up for illegal immigration. California alone has a net cost of \$3 billion dollars in a single year for such services.

The problem is most critical for hospitals. By law anyone coming to an emergency room must be treated. Since illegal workers are not covered by insurance, they use emergency room service as their sole source of health care. The cost falls to the hospital, whether private or public, to the point where some facilities have simply closed their doors. When the federal government proposed to spend \$4 billion partially to reimburse doctors and hospitals, many native-born working poor asked why they should be burdened with debt to pay medical bills while their taxes subsidize the free care of people who are in the country illegally.

Remittances each year also remove billions of dollars from circulation within the American economy, and the underground economy created by illegal immigration is, according to some economists, growing at perhaps a faster rate than the legitimate economy, thus costing the federal government hundreds of billions of dollars in lost taxes, money that if collected would wipe out the current budget deficit. The exploitation of cheap immigrant labor is therefore by no means cheap for taxpayers who are in essence subsidizing many special interest groups that profit from cheap foreign labor.

Uncontrolled illegal immigration is pushing down wages at the lower end of the income scale, incurring high costs to the taxpayer, and depriving the government of revenue it needs to meet its obligations. That the second generation of immigrants will not assimilate in the way other waves of immigrants eventually did poses another troubling problem. Sociologists Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut, in *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*, say that the "transformative potential, for better or for worse," of the second generation "is immense" with the possibility that it will "catalyze a quantum leap in social problems." In a similar vein Harvard scholar and political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, warns in his latest book *Who Are We?* that "nothing less than our national identity is at stake" if the historically unprecedented wave of mass migration is allowed to continue.

## PURPOSELY POROUS BORDERS

Despite the downside of massive sustained illegal immigration, the government has systematically abandoned the enforcement of the nation's immigration laws. This began under President Clinton when he stopped enforcing employer sanctions, penalties for employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens, and by reducing border management to nothing more than an expensive, dishonest, and demoralizing display of empty ritual.

The Clinton administration did not act alone. Some members of the very Congress that passed the laws in the first place pressured enforcement agencies not to enforce the law at the behest of business interests that profit from an unchecked flow of tractable labor. The Bush administration completed the process by ending what remained of interior enforcement and by continuing the charade of border controls.

The Livermore Sector of the Border Patrol in the San Francisco Bay Area was, according to one former senior Border Patrol official, "man for man the most productive in the country." It was shut down in 2004.

The 9/11 Commission recommended an increase in the manpower of the Border Patrol, and in 2005, following those recommendations Congress authorized the hiring of 2,000 more Border Patrol agents. But the president's budget allocated only enough money for 210 agents, not even enough to cover attrition. When asked about the paltry sum, outgoing Homeland Security chief Tom Ridge said that money for such purposes is "fool's gold."

Since June 2004 the Border Patrol has been restricted to the border itself and to stationary points, thus ending one of its traditional missions -- sweeping interior regions for illegal aliens. One frustrated agent says this unprecedented policy is the equivalent of putting a ten-yard limit on bank robbery: if the robber gets beyond that point he can keep the money.

Joe Dessaro, a recently retired Border Patrol agent and union chief, wrote in his farewell letter to the union that the Border Patrol is "one of the most inefficient and misleading agencies in the history of government." Echoing this sentiment another agent hundreds of miles away observes that "the whole thing is the biggest bunco job in history, spending millions not to do the job."

None of this is lost on those who would cross the border illegally. They know that once across the line they are home free, and that if caught at the border they will be returned to try again until they make it. One agent says he caught the same man three times in one shift at the same place on the fence. Border crossers also know the routine. When they are picked up and put in vans, some ask, "Where are my juice and crackers?"

## CITIZEN RESPONSE

Special interests and a growing illegal immigration lobby have been able to completely trump majority opinion on immigration, leaving the public little opportunity to express its

wishes. One means employed by the public to get around special interest obstruction is the ballot initiative.

In 1992 when the flow of illegal entrants created such havoc on the border and became such an obvious drain on public services, the people of California passed, by a margin of 59 percent, Proposition 187, a ballot measure designed to deny public benefits to anyone in the country illegally. A federal judge and later a Democratic governor, both using questionable means, showed contempt both for the people's will and the democratic process when they jettisoned the new law.

In 2005 frustrated citizens tried another ballot initiative, Proposition 200 in Arizona, but given the kind of obstruction we know so well it will probably never be enforced.

The Minuteman Project was yet another attempt by frustrated and increasingly angry citizens to express their opposition to a de facto open-border policy. The project worked.

During the next to the last week of the vigil Richard Humphries, a Minuteman coordinator and local resident, took me in his jeep along the border between Naco and the San Pedro River. As we traveled the rutted road we saw no signs of illegal entry along what had been just three weeks before a major route of illegal entry. The countryside was deserted except for a rancher driving his pick-up truck on the other side of the rickety border fence, and a lone man casually walking towards a corral near the San Pedro River which is used as a staging ground for illegal crossings.

"Que tal! A donde va?" we asked (meaning: "Hi! Where are you going")? With a broad grin he said in English, "The United States." If that is what he had in mind he was one of the very few that month, at least along that stretch of the line.

When asked how things were going, a Border Patrolman on duty smiled and said suggestively, "Quiet." We chatted with another on-duty agent for a few minutes. As we were leaving he called out, "I'm not supposed to say this, but you guys are doing a great job!" and then gave a big thumbs-up.

The Border Patrol management seems to have thought that the Minutemen had done an effective job, because after the project had ended and the volunteers had gone home, agents at Naco were told not to arrest illegal aliens in their section for fear that a jump in the apprehension rate would confirm the project's success.

Critics say the project did nothing more than push the stream of migration around the manned observation posts. Minutemen, however, said that their presence proved that border controls could work if serious vigils were mounted similar to the one they operated during the month of April. Since the formal democratic process remains closed to the majority of the public on this issue, it will take more such demonstrations before the political elites become responsive to a major policy issue that involves such serious consequences both for the short and the long term.

Chris Simcox promises more border watches along both the Mexican and the Canadian borders. And a border watch is planned for California in August or earlier, apparently with the approval of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

This much is certain: People along the border where the Minutemen held their watch appreciated the peaceful month it gave them. In a half-page ad in the Sunday Sierra Vista Herald local residents told them: "Thanks for doing what our government won't... close the border to illegal aliens. It was the quietest month we've had in many years... you made us feel safe."