

U.S. PLANS BORDER DITCH AGAINST DRUGS FROM MEXICO

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Body

WASHINGTON (AP) - A four-mile-long **ditch** that one official of the Justice Department compared Wednesday to a "buried Berlin Wall" is being **planned** for a stretch of the **U.S.**-Mexican **border** in an effort to stem **drug** smuggling into Southern California. But the **plan** is being criticized as "too little, too late" by a group that advocates building fences along the **border**. And immigrant-rights organizations are criticizing the **plan** as repressive. Associate Attorney General Francis A. Keating II said he had proposed the idea last fall as a way to discourage **drug** smugglers from driving loads of cocaine, marijuana and heroin across the **border** near San Diego. Keating said the Immigration and Naturalization Service was undertaking the **plan**, which was approved last month by Attorney General Dick Thornburgh. Keating likened the **ditch** to "our buried Berlin Wall." He said it would be deep and wide enough to discourage smugglers from driving trucks and cars across the **border** along a four-mile stretch of flat desert east of San Ysidro, Calif. Keating said the desert stretch in the Otay Mesa area east of San Ysidro was a major **drug**-smuggling route. "The cocaine, marijuana and heroin from **Mexico** is being carried across the **border** between the points of entry" that are operated by the Customs Service, said Keating, who is leaving office with the start of the administration of President George Bush. "This is not intended in any way to interfere with legitimate traffic or trade," he said.

"It is not intended to stop legal entry." Keating said that although the **Border** Patrol had tried to stop traffic across the desert by digging shallow trenches, smugglers had been able to fill in the **ditches** to drive through. "No country is a country that can't protect its **border**," said Keating, who oversaw law-enforcement agencies in the Justice Department, including the **Border** Patrol. "This is one of many systems to do it. "I am sure it will be applauded by people who are sick and tired of the deluge of cocaine and heroin that is flowing across the Mexican **border**," Keating said in an interview. But the **plan** has its critics. "The drainage **ditch** is too little, too late if it is to be taken seriously as a method of deterring illegal entry," said Patrick Burns, assistant director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform. "There is a serious problem at San Diego of which a very, very small component is high-speed drive-throughs" by **drug** smugglers, said Burns. His organization is preparing to release a study proposing ways to "harden" the **U.S.**-Mexican **border**. Eugene Hernandez, an official of the Mexican-American Political Association in Los Angeles, called the **plan** "a very repressive and a very ill-founded idea." "Rather than constructing the **ditch**, I think they should hire more people, more agents at the **border**," Hernandez said. (3* edition continuation) The isolated Otay Mesa area is a gateway into Southern California for illegal immigrants.

Graphic

Map; MAPS...FOUR MILE **DITCH**...showing location of proposed **ditch** in the Otay Mesa area east of San Ysidro, California; insert shows Area Of Detail

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