

## **Illegal migrants gravitate to Ariz. border; Continuing flow fueling fresh fight over policy at leakiest sector in U.S.**

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### **Body**

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Along a rugged stretch of the Mexican **border** here in southern **Arizona, U.S.** authorities captured 687 **illegal** immigrants in a 24-hour period last week, three times the number captured near San Diego. During the past eight months, agents have apprehended 168,000 **migrants** along this **sector** of the **border**.

The **border** crossers are so determined, and so impervious to a long-running buildup of federal agents and technology, that few here think President Obama's recent decision to dispatch 1,200 National Guard soldiers and \$500 million will make much difference.

"I doubt it, frankly," said Don Severe, a vocal opponent of **illegal** immigration who favors stronger measures, including certain incarceration. "It sounds good, but what are they going to do? We have a very serious problem."

**Arizona**, home of a controversial new law that makes it a state crime to be in the country illegally, has become the **leakiest** portion of the nearly 2,000-mile **border**. The **continuing flow** of **illegal** immigrants, compounded by a rise in narcotics traffic and the slaying of an **Arizona** rancher, perhaps by a **border** crosser, has triggered a **fresh fight over** immigration **policy**, animating activities on both sides of the debate.

On Saturday, as thousands rallied in Phoenix for and against the new law, Gov. Jan Brewer (R) sought to remove Attorney General Terry Goddard (D) from defending **Arizona** against expected legal challenges. Although Brewer said she feared that Goddard would collude with the Obama administration, which is weighing such a challenge, Goddard said he would faithfully represent the state despite personal opposition to the law. Meanwhile, Republican politicians, led by Brewer and Sen. John McCain, are calling for stricter **border** security measures.

The issue has polarized the community in ways that residents say are disturbing.

"I have seen situations in families where they are **fighting**," said the Rev. Vili Valderrama, a priest at San Felipe de Jesus parish in heavily Hispanic Nogales. He said benefactors who support the law have vowed to withhold contributions from the Tucson Catholic Diocese because clergy publicly oppose it.

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"There are not a lot of places in this community where you can have a civil dialogue," said the Rev. Randy Mayer, pastor of Good Shepherd United Church of Christ in Sahuarita, 50 miles north of Nogales. "The conversation has changed in its tone. It has become much more polarized, much more hostile."

Nogales is the heart of a 262-mile stretch of **border** defined by sharp rises, steep ravines and brutal desert heat. As **border** controls are tightened elsewhere, including through the construction of a **border** fence in parts of **Arizona**, California, Texas and New Mexico, Mexican **migrants** and smugglers have **gravitated** to the 90,000-square-mile area known by **U.S.** Customs and **Border** Protection as the Tucson **Sector**.

"When you plug a hole in the wall, the water looks for another spot to **flow** through. **Arizona** is that spot," said Nogales police chief Jeff Kirkham, who reported that immigrants are "going **over** the wall, going through the wall or through tunnels."

Others try to make their way though the remote desert where the high fence stops. Once across the **border**, they face a daunting trek that can stretch 30 miles or more in heat approaching 100 degrees. Agents staff checkpoints and crisscross the area, supported by millions of dollars worth of sensors, cameras, surveillance aircraft and computer technology.

Since 2006, staffing of the Tucson **Sector** has increased 30 percent, to about 3,200 officers. But immigrants from across the globe keep coming **over** the **border** -- alone or in groups, sometimes guided by smugglers, sometimes arriving at official crossings neatly dressed and with fake papers.

On a typical day, nearly 1 million people cross from Mexico into the **United States**, according to **U.S.** government figures. About 270,000 vehicles cross the Southwest **border** every 24 hours, along with about 57,000 truck, rail and sea containers. Sixty percent of the Mexican fruit and vegetables entering the **United States** comes through Nogales.

"This is our busy time of year," said Robert L. Boatright, deputy chief of the Tucson **Sector**, talking about **illegal** immigrants, not produce. He said it would be impossible to "seal the **border**," as some critics demand. "The number of agents it would take 24-7 would be incredible."

**Border** agents have "close to daily" encounters with smugglers with guns, most linked to drug smuggling, he said. In announcing the National Guard deployment, which echoes earlier approaches, Obama emphasized the need to slow the drugs **flowing** north and the guns and cash heading south to the cartels waging war on Mexican state authority.

By the same token, the number of captured **border** crossers -- an indication of the volume of people who are getting though illegally -- dropped 41 percent between 2005 and 2009. The **border** is at "an unprecedented state of control," Boatright said. "I know that's **s** hard to believe with what you see and read right now."

Although the **flow** of drugs appears to be rising, Kirkham said, Nogales's 64 police officers are not seeing a spillover of violence from Mexico. Property crimes have been static, and Nogales has had just one homicide in the past three years. "People that do cross here, they want to get out of this area as quickly and quietly as possible," he said.

So far, 210 miles of the 262-mile Tucson **Sector border** is fenced. McCain, facing GOP primary challenger J.D. Hayworth, a **border** hawk, made waves by declaring in a campaign advertisement filmed in Nogales: "Complete the danged fence."

Boatright said the rough terrain makes finishing the fence impossible or unnecessary.

"We're looking at a very small portion that we need to address," Boatright said. "I'm talking two or three miles."

McCain is seeking 6,000 more National Guard soldiers, including 3,000 in **Arizona**. Yet in Nogales, Gustavo Lozano, an activist who favors comprehensive reform, believes that no measures now in the pipeline will stop **illegal** immigration.

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"Whatever fear they build up, whatever troops come to the border," Lozano said, "people are still going to cross."

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