

Border toll worth a try

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Body

Why not charge a \$ 1 **toll** at all U.S. **border** crossings? Because, say critics, it would be hard to collect, turn **border** agents into moneychangers, punish honest travelers and create air-polluting traffic jams.

The mayor of El Paso, Texas, even told a congressional subcommittee the fee would encourage illegal immigration, ignite an economic decline and force Mexico to devalue the peso.

Goodness! Moreover: Preposterous.

This fee isn't some wild imposition. Rather, it's a sensible response to urgent budgetary needs.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, the idea's current champion, estimates it would generate \$ 400 million a year, to be given to various immigration services. That's \$ 40 million more than the entire 1993 **Border** Patrol budget.

Feinstein's idea isn't a new one. Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming made a similar proposal 11 years ago.

The idea has plenty of precedent. Travelers arriving by air or sea already pay a \$ 5 Immigration and Naturalization Service charge and a \$ 5 Customs charge. And three years ago, Congress ordered the INS to experiment with a fee-collection project at **border** crossings. Since then, a pilot program on the northern **border** in Washington state has been a considerable success.

The fee is imperfect, of course. But if it works a hardship on commuters, offer a discounted pass. If it deters the poor, allow waivers.

As to the Texas mayor's larger fears of economic decline, pollution and illegal entry: Forget them. The economic forces at work on the **border** and driving immigration are greater than this fee; so are the **border**'s environmental problems.

A transborder **toll** won't solve all our immigration problems, but neither is it a Pandora's tax. Give it a shot.

Notes

THE EDITORIAL PAGE; Today's debate is on ENTERING THE USA and whether a **border**-crossing fee should be charged; OUR VIEW; A small **border**-crossing **toll** makes perfect sense, dire predictions notwithstanding.

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