

MEX. FENCE GOOD IDEA, BUSH SAYS MAKES SWITCH ON BARRIER ISSUE

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Body

WASHINGTON - Hoping to woo conservatives skeptical of his immigration reforms, President **Bush** reversed himself yesterday and endorsed plans to erect a **fence** along parts of the Mexican border.

Though long opposed to using **fences** to try to keep Mexicans from crossing illegally into the U.S., **Bush** acknowledged in Yuma, Ariz., that "it **makes** sense to use **fencing** here."

He, nonetheless, argued that a **barrier** won't work everywhere along the border.

"It doesn't **make** sense to use **fencing** in other parts of the border," **Bush** told Fox News.

White House spokesman Tony Snow told reporters that **Bush** backs a Senate measure to build a 370-mile **barrier** along the 2,000-mile border at favorite crossing sites for illegal immigrants and the smugglers who sneak them into the U.S.

"He doesn't think you **fence** off the entire border. . . . There are places where **fences** are appropriate, and you build **fences** there," Snow **said**.

"I don't think anybody has seriously proposed building a wall across the entire border," Snow insisted.

Bush is still trying to placate Republicans who are angry that he supports a guest-worker program that could lead to citizenship for most of the 12 million illegal immigrants believed to be in the U.S.

Bush's change of heart was the latest concession to right-wing dissenters in his own party. Democrats labeled it a classic flip-flop.

"Let me get this straight: When it comes to border security, the President was against it before he was for it," **said** Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W. Va.). "The President ought to stop waffling on border security."

Team **Bush** also sent Congress a breakdown of its \$1.95 billion proposal to deploy 6,000 National Guard troops along the border and hire the same number of Border Patrol agents.

The White House asked for \$756 million to deploy the Guard troops, with the remaining \$1.2 billion going for the Border Patrol agents, **fences** and expanded room in lockups for illegal immigrants caught in the U.S.

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The Border Patrol would get two Predator drone aircraft and five helicopters as well as electronic video watchtowers and ground sensors to monitor the border.

Pentagon officials, meanwhile, **said** the troops who will assist in border security will live in tent cities, and many will be unarmed.

"Any soldier in a position of potential danger will be armed," **said** Assistant Defense Secretary Paul McHale, but the majority will be in rear areas without the need for weapons.

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Graphic

AFP President **Bush** goes for a spin in a Border Patrol dune buggy while touring the Mexico-U.S. border at San Luis, Ariz., yesterday.

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