

'Minutemen' End Unofficial Border Patrol, but Plan to Return

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Body

Volunteers recruited over the Internet to monitor illegal immigration along a stretch of Arizona's **border ended** their monthlong campaign this weekend.

Members of the **Minuteman** Project hailed the program as a success, and organizers said they **planned** to expand the mission to the other states along the Mexican **border** and to parts of the Canadian **border**.

"This could not have been done without all of you," Chris Simcox, a co-organizer of the project, told some 150 volunteers and supporters gathered Saturday at a church in Palominas, Ariz. "You did this together -- you the people."

Organizers said nearly 900 volunteers, some of them armed, had spent at least one eight-hour shift in the field through Friday, working mostly stationary **patrols** along a 23-mile stretch of **border** in Cochise County. The final eight-hour shift was scheduled to **end** at 6 a.m. Sunday.

Organizers said volunteers' calls to the **Border Patrol** resulted in the arrests of 335 illegal immigrants. Organizers had ordered volunteers not to detain any illegal **border** crossers they encountered, and no major incidents were reported.

Critics of the program, including **Border Patrol** officials, have said that it was little more than a nuisance that attracted significant attention from the media and civil rights groups watching volunteers for possible rights violations.

President Bush expressed his opposition to "vigilantes," and many people on the Mexican side of the **border** referred to the volunteers as "migrant hunters."

But Jim Gilchrist, a founder of the program, said the group's efforts brought nationwide attention to the problem of illegal immigration. Mr. Gilchrist said, however, that unless the work continued, "it's going to be viewed as just a monthlong dog-and-pony show."

Mike Minatrea, a ham radio operator who was stationed near Naco for a week with his wife, Kristi, said the **Minuteman** Project "has told the rest of America what they can do to get something done" -- protest in a calm, orderly and productive fashion.

Ed Whitbred, a supervisor for the project, said it showed that the American people had the will and the desire to secure the **border** even if the government did not.

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"I'm afraid we're on a slippery slope if we don't solve this problem," Mr. Whitbred said, referring to illegal immigration.

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