

NEEDED AT THE BORDER AGENTS GUARDING THE LINE, NOT POLITICIANS PEDDLING ONE

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Body

WHEN the former governor of Arkansas knows more about dealing with illegal immigration than the former mayor of San Diego, you have to cry for California. The Clinton administration's new **border** initiative puts Gov. Pete Wilson and our two senators to shame.

The \$540 million-plus proposal would add 1,000 more **Border** Patrol **agents**, upgrade computers and other equipment, and install new fences and detection devices. For legal immigrants, the Immigration and Naturalization Service would streamline asylum paperwork and encourage citizenship.

We've argued before that the **border needs** more **agents** and less election- year posturing by California pols who would militarize the **border**, impose crossing taxes, and deny schooling, citizenship and health care to the children of undocumented immigrants.

Illegal immigration is a fact of life. The idea of completely securing the 2,000-mile southern **border** is an illusion. But we can deter illegal immigrants by placing more **agents** at strategic crossings, which Clinton's plan would do at San Diego and El Paso.

However, we're skeptical of two other points in the Clinton initiative: deporting illegal immigrants now in U.S. prisons, and tougher enforcement of laws against hiring undocumented workers.

Deporting prisoners sounds good, but the idea has more tangles than barbed wire.

American prosecutors aren't going to transfer a murderer, bank robber or rapist if they think he'll be released too soon from a Mexican prison and then get back across the **border**. Also, as civil libertarians point out, transferred prisoners would lose their rights to appeal and parole under U.S. laws. A binational appeals or parole board could resolve these issues, but it would cost millions of dollars, wiping out most of the savings to U.S. taxpayers.

As for cracking down on employers who hire illegal workers, forget it. Study after study has shown that employer sanctions don't even slow illegal immigration. Worse, they have led to widespread discrimination against U.S. Latinos by employers who'd rather hire somebody else than deal with the verification paperwork. Get rid of employer sanctions.

With more money and manpower in the right places, the INS and **Border** Patrol can become smarter, quicker and more humane. Pete Wilson and Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein should take note: Bunker mentalities may win the resentment vote, but dealing with illegal immigration takes brains, courage -- and compassion.

Notes

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