

Perspectives shaped by daily experience; A border sheriff, an urban priest, a factory owner and others close to issue weigh in on immigration

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Body

PHOENIX -- Cochise County **Sheriff** Larry Dever says he pressed politicians in Washington for nearly a decade to do something about invaders swarming into southern Arizona from Mexico.

He testified before Congress five times. He ranted about crime, the costs to the justice system and the strain on property **owners**. He says all he got was lip service.

"How much more do you really expect people to take?" demands the 54-year-old lawman. "You've seen the Minuteman Project gain momentum. What I've learned in 30 years of enforcement is: If you don't do your job, someone will do it for you."

Dever views the Minutemen civilian **border** watch group -- as well as demonstrations for immigrant rights -- as fruits of failed U.S. policy. Blocked by "paralysis and polarization," he says, politicians did nothing until the **border** mess became a nationwide calamity.

Today, real coyotes seem outnumbered in Cochise County by the human version. "Coyotes" is the term for smugglers who lead illegal immigrants across a **border** defended mostly by barbed-wire fence.

Cochise County's 83 deputies patrol an area of rangeland, high desert and mountains larger than Connecticut. It's a place where Wyatt Earp once ruled as law.

Dever talks about one of his men working alone at night in a 1,200-square-mile sector and coming across a van stuffed with 31 illegal immigrants. The deputy called the U.S. **Border** Patrol but was told it would be a three-hour wait.

"What's he supposed to do?" Dever asks, noting that the deputy cannot serve Cochise residents if he's babysitting a load of immigrants. Dever called the **Border** Patrol and demanded the deputy get help in 20 minutes, which he did.

The real trouble, Dever says, began in the late 1990s after the **Border** Patrol launched enforcement campaigns in San Diego and El Paso. He says that strategy funneled illegal immigrants into the deadly Arizona desert.

Cochise County, in Arizona's southeast corner, became a thoroughway from Mexico. Corpses littered the desert. Ranchers screamed about trash and theft.

University of Arizona researchers calculated that immigrants accounted for 37% of the justice system costs in Cochise County. Today, about \$5 million of the county's \$49 million budget goes to arresting, prosecuting and jailing illegal immigrants, Cochise Board of Supervisors Chairman Pat Call says.

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"Four or five years ago, you couldn't get anybody to talk about this," Dever says. "Now everybody wants to talk about it."

Out of that talk emerged proposals such as a wall from Brownsville, Texas, to San Diego, which Dever views as "a waste of resources and money." He favors a 2,000-mile underground sensor system, backed by unmanned aircraft to spot illegals.

Dever opposes granting citizenship to many of the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the USA. He says they should be deported gradually, then replaced as needed by legal guest workers.

As for recent immigrant rallies in the USA, the sheriff grinds his teeth. "That just makes my blood boil. Can you imagine 100,000 or even 10,000 of us ... marching down there?"

By Dennis Wagner, who reports daily for The Arizona Republic in Phoenix. Contributing: Donna Leinwand of USA TODAY.

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