

Governors Say They Will Raze Border Town Used by Smugglers

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Body

The **governors** of New Mexico and its southern neighbor, the Mexican state Chihuahua, agreed Friday to bulldoze or board up buildings in a semi-abandoned **town** just inside Mexico that is a haven for would-be immigrants and **smugglers**.

Gov. Bill Richardson and Gov. Jose Reyes Baeza of Chihuahua also **said** they hoped to establish a police presence to end lawlessness in the **border town**, Las Chepas, which has been used as a staging ground for migrants and drug and human **smugglers**.

It was the **governors**' first meeting since Mr. Richardson, citing growing violence, declared a state of emergency in the New Mexico **border** region earlier this month.

Gov. Janet Napolitano of Arizona declared a similar emergency in her state.

Las Chepas is home to a dozen full-time residents. A **Border** Patrol agent, Rick Moody, **said** agents monitored the area with a tower-mounted camera and watched as a daily caravan of old school buses ferried people along a dusty washboard road into the **town**.

When the migrants leave, they often are attacked by "**border** bandits," Mr. Moody **said**.

"They tell them to just keep walking north and don't look back," Mr. Moody **said**. "We've tried to apprehend some of these bandits."

But there are too many places to hide and too few roads, he added.

"It's a lawless area," Mr. Moody **said**.

Leopaldo Castillo Rodriguez, 66, who has lived in Las Chepas for 22 years, **said** he did not plan to leave. He **said** he did not understand why Mr. Richardson would want to demolish the **town**.

"It would be the same if it wasn't here," he **said** of the situation this week.

Others in the **town said** they were upset that they were hearing of Mr. Richardson's plans from reporters and not their own government.

"People here don't know what's going on," Francisco Apalaca Ruiz **said**.

Espifanio Ruiz, who runs one of the **town's** three stores, acknowledged that hordes of migrants come through the **town**, but **said** the area was not much of a draw.

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"There are no hotels here," Mr. Ruiz **said**.

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