

Bush wants Guard to police border

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Body

WASHINGTON — President **Bush**, trying to build momentum for a major overhaul of the nation's immigration laws, is considering plans to shore up the Mexican **border** with National **Guard** troops paid for by the federal government, according to senior administration officials.

One defense official said military leaders believe the number of troops required could range from 3,500 to perhaps 10,000, depending on the final plan. Another administration official cautioned that the 10,000 figure was too high.

The officials insisted on anonymity since no decision has been announced.

The president was expected to reveal his plans in an address Monday at 7 p.m. It will be the first time he has used the Oval Office for a domestic policy speech — a gesture intended to underscore the importance he places on the divisive immigration issue.

The key questions Friday were exactly how many National **Guard** troops might be deployed, for how long and at what cost to federal taxpayers — as well as the problem of possible disruption of upcoming deployments to Iraq and elsewhere overseas.

As discussions among the White House, the Pentagon and the states continued on how the military could be used to secure the southern **border**, defense officials said that states **want** the federal government to pick up what will be a significant tab for the increased security. Officials had no estimates on that cost.

Bush's speech Monday night is intended to build support for broad immigration overhaul by taking substantive steps to secure the **border**.

Paul McHale, assistant secretary of defense for homeland defense, asked officials earlier this week to offer options for the use of military resources and troops — particularly the National **Guard** — along the **border** with Mexico, according to defense officials familiar with the discussions.

Defense officials said the National **Guard** may be used only until significant additions to the existing civilian **border** patrols can be fully funded and completed.

Currently there are about 100 National **Guard** troops involved in counter-drug operations, including some along the **border**, said **Guard** Bureau spokesman Jack Harrison.

He said there are also 10 to 15 **Guard** members — mostly engineers — helping **border** patrol agents with vehicle and heavy equipment support.

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