



Written by [James Heiser](#) on November 3, 2011

Obama Scales Back Border Patrol Enforcement

One of the effective programs conducted by the Border Patrol has been to routinely conduct searches for illegal aliens on buses, trains, and airports along the northern border. Now, however, the current administration is quietly bringing such searches to an end. Associated Press reporter Gene Johnson explains:



The U.S. Border Patrol has quietly stopped its controversial practice of routinely searching buses, trains and airports for illegal immigrants at transportation hubs along the northern border and in the nation's interior, preventing agents from using what had long been an effective tool for tracking down people here illegally, The Associated Press has learned.

Current and former Border Patrol agents said field offices around the country began receiving the order last month - soon after the Obama administration announced that to ease an overburdened immigration system, it would allow many illegal immigrants to remain in the country while it focuses on deporting those who have committed crimes.

While the Obama administration's standard policy has been a constant expansion of intrusive government, it has decided that the solution to the crisis of illegal immigration is not more rigorous enforcement of the law, but to curtail enforcement. It is hard to attribute any need for such curtailment to a lack of available manpower; after all, some agents serving in offices near the northern border have complained of a lack of sufficient work to keep them occupied. (Thus, for example, a Border Patrol agent with the Port Angeles, Washington office [complained](#) that the office was a "black hole" with "no mission, no purpose" for its 40 agents; according to one press account, "he and his fellow agents in Port Angeles had little relevant work to perform and sometimes passed time by simply driving around the Peninsula, what agents call the 'Baja 500.'")

It is also hard to attribute the administration's undermining of the patrol's mission to a lack of operational authority; as reported previously for *The New American*, some members of Congress have sought to vastly expand the power of agents on both the northern and southern borders to enter areas administered by other federal bureaucracies.

Now, if the administration's new restriction on the scope of law enforcement conducted by the Border Patrol is allowed to stand, the expanded ranks and powers provided to agents will be used to accomplish even less.

In the assessment of agents working on the northern border, in particular, the searches that were formerly conducted on public transportation were quite effective. As Johnson explains:



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But agents said it was an effective way to catch unlawful immigrants, including smugglers and possible terrorists, who had evaded detection at the border, as well as people who had overstayed their visas. Often, those who evade initial detection head quickly for the nearest public transportation in hopes of reaching other parts of the country.

Halting the practice has baffled the agents, especially in some stations along the northern border — from Bellingham, Wash., to Houlton, Maine — where the so-called “transportation checks” have been the bulk of their everyday duties. The Border Patrol is authorized to check vehicles within 100 miles of the border.

If the goal of the U.S. Border Patrol is to stop the incursion of illegal aliens, then the prior practice of watching for aliens utilizing public transportation made a great deal of sense; unlike proposed legislation that would grant power to the agency to have “immediate access” to public lands “for purposes of conducting activities that assist in securing the border (including access to maintain and construct roads, construct a fence, use vehicles to patrol and set up monitoring equipment),” the practice of agents operating in public places had proven itself an effective, and relatively low cost, practice. Why, for example, grant the Border Patrol the power to build roads through the Olympic National Forest if agents will no longer expend the effort of checking identification at train or bus stations around Puget Sound? Removing the ability of agents to check in public places for flagrant violations of the law could have the same effect for the U.S. Border Patrol as cancelation of the space shuttle program has had for NASA: A large and expensive federal agency will continue to add to the national debt while simultaneously being incapable of fulfilling vital elements of its central purpose for existing in the first place.



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