



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on April 28, 2010

Border "Secure as Ever," DHS Chief Says

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano told the Senate Judiciary Committee on April 27 that the Southwest border is "as secure as it has ever been," while the Associated Press reported that the capital of the former Arizona governor's home state has been dubbed the "kidnapping capital" of the U.S., due to cross-border human smuggling and drug trafficking.



The Department of Homeland Security's Southwest Border Initiative is making "unparalleled progress in creating a safe and secure Southwest border," the DHS Secretary told the committee, while citing significant increases in law enforcement personnel and crime-fighting technology and physical barriers along the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexican border. The number of Border Patrol agents has doubled to 20,000 in the past five years, she said, including 4,000 in Arizona. The number of illegal immigrants caught crossing the border has dropped from 1.6 million in 2000 to fewer than 600,000 last year, she said, a drop of more than 60 percent. But Napolitano, who was Arizona's governor before accepting the appointment to her cabinet post, acknowledged the state is an exception to the overall trend. While arrests of illegal immigrants there has dropped from 700,000 in 2000 to about 350,000 last year, more than 50 percent of all illegal border crossers are now entering Arizona. The federal government has put up 652 miles of fences and vehicle barriers in California, making Arizona an easier alternative for human and drug trafficking.

Some 990,000 aliens were caught illegally crossing into Arizona from Mexico in the last three years, an average of 900 a day, Associated Press writers Jonathan C. Cooper and Amanda Lee reported in an article chronicling events leading up to last week's enactment of the controversial Arizona law aimed at cracking down on illegal immigrants. Local police have grown frustrated at their inability to keep up



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with the drug trafficking and violent crime often associated with the illegal border crossings. Federal agents seized 1.2 million pounds of marijuana last year in Arizona, an average of 1.5 tons per day.

But it is the violent crime, much of it believed to be related to the drug trafficking that has most troubled the state's residents. Phoenix has averaged a kidnapping a day in recent years, the AP reports, with some resulting in torture and death. Last month prominent cattle rancher Rob Krentz was murdered near the border and authorities suspect the killer or killers came from across the border. That gave added impetus to the demand that state lawmakers act to stem a tide of illegal immigrants that many believe Washington has ignored.

"While the Bush administration dropped the ball on border security and illegal immigration, the Obama administration can't even find it," Republican state Rep. John Kavanagh, told the AP.

But Napolitano said Homeland Security has been taking action on the issues many in Congress said they wanted addressed when efforts to pass comprehensive immigration reform were defeated in 2006 and 2007.

"Today, the Border Patrol is better staffed than at any time in its 85-year history," the Secretary told the committee, citing a doubling of the number of agents working on the Border Enforcement Security Task forces that combine federal, state, local and international efforts to combat crime in the border regions. DHS has also increased the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in the Border Liaison Program, an intelligence-sharing effort with Mexico law enforcement, she said. The department has tripled the number of intelligence analysts working on the Southwest border to combat drug smuggling and the violence associated with it, Napolitano said, and has increased the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement attache officials in Mexico by 50 percent.

Agents at the border and ports of entry, have also been equipped with upgraded technology including mobile X-ray units and low-energy imaging systems to detect and intercept illegal drugs, firearms, counterfeit currency, and other contraband, Napolitano said. The efforts resulted in a 14-percent increase in the seizure of "illicit cash along the Southwest border" in 2009 over the previous year, she said, along with a 29 percent increase in the seizure of illegal firearms. The 1.65 million kilograms of illegal drugs seized last year was an increase of 15 percent over 2008, the Secretary said.

In response to the Krentz murder, DHS sent additional helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft and mobile surveillance equipment to the area and supplemented regular manned aerial surveillance with two new helicopter flights per day. Teams on horseback and all-terrain vehicles are patrolling the desert terrain. U.S and Mexican officials are working together in investigating the murder and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has sent 25 additional agents to assist the Cochise County Sheriff's office in the case, Napolitano said. ICE is offering a \$25,000 reward for information leading to an arrest. The U.S. has also supported Mexican President Felipe Calderon's fight against drug cartels in Mexico with \$1.4 billion in aid. Since 2006, more than 20,000 people have been killed in Mexico's drug wars.

Napolitano conceded that more needed to be done, but remained critical of the Arizona law, signed last week by Republican Governor Jan Brewer, that makes it a state crime for illegal aliens to be in Arizona and requires police during lawful stops to question people they have reason to believe are illegal immigrants. [The law reads: "For any lawful contact made by a law enforcement official or agency of this state or a county, city, town or other political subdivision of this state where reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States, a reasonable attempt shall be made, when practicable, to determine the immigration status of the person."]



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"We believe it will detract from and siphon resources that we need to focus on those in the country illegally who are — those who are committing the most serious crimes in addition to violating our nation's immigration laws," Napolitano said. But despite the secretary's assurances about the extent of the DHS effort at border control, committee member Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) questioned its effectiveness.

"What happened in Arizona is that good people are so afraid of an out-of-control border that they had to resort to a law that I think is unconstitutional — it doesn't represent the best way forward," said committee member Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.).

Graham had been working with Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) on an immigration reform bill that would allow people here illegally to pay a fine and whatever they may owe in back taxes and provide community service in order to achieve legal status. But he announced over the weekend that he was abandoning that effort after Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) said he was determined to pass an immigration reform bill this year, a move Graham denounced as "a cynical ploy" to win Latino votes for Reid and his fellow Democrats in this year's congressional elections. A reform bill may be ready for passage by "by 2012 if we're smart, and we address the big elephant in the room and that is that our borders are broken and there's a war going on," Graham said yesterday in an apparent reference to drug war in Mexico and the U.S. border states.

"I bet you everything I own, if you bring it up in this environment, not having done anything that is going to reassure the American public that we won't have 20 million more [illegal immigrants], that you're going to crash and burn, and that [if] immigration comes up this year, it is absolutely devastating to the future of this issue," Graham said.

Photo: Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano at the Senate Judiciary Committee in Washington, April 27, 2010: AP Images



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