

Effort to shut southern border to terrorists found ineffective

By Niko Price
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SASABE, Mexico — A crackdown along the U.S.-Mexico border designed to prevent terrorists from entering the United States hasn't stopped even one known militant from slipping into America since Sept. 11, an Associated Press investigation has found.

Instead, the tightening net of Border Patrol and Immigration agents has slowed trade, snarled traffic and cost American taxpayers millions, perhaps billions, of dollars, while hundreds of migrants have died trying to evade the growing army of border authorities.

"If there are concerns about the border in national security terms, they are misplaced," said Claudia Smith, a migration activist who directs the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation.

Sept. 11, 2001, was a defining moment in the politics of illegal immigration. The terrorist attacks abruptly halted major reforms designed to legalize much of the flow of workers heading north from Mexico. The reforms had won support from President Bush — a former Texas governor — and members of the U.S. Congress.

After more than 3,000 people died in the al-Qaida strikes on

the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Bush administration told Mexican officials they were concerned that easing migration restrictions could lead to another terrorist attack.

Instead of opening the border, the United States closed it further. Bush invested heavily in border protection, budgeting \$9 billion for the fiscal year that began this Oct. 1, a \$400 million increase over the previous year. The government was unable to provide budget figures for earlier years.

The number of Border Patrol agents assigned to the southern border rose from 8,500 in 2000 to at least 9,500 today. Staffing along the Mexican border for the immigration, customs and agriculture departments, which monitor legal crossing points, grew from 4,371 in fiscal 2001 to 4,873 in the fiscal year that just ended.

New technology gives Border Patrol agents state-of-the-art helicopters to search for migrants from the air and a new generation of ground sensors and remote video systems to track them on the ground.

"We have become much more vigilant than we were just a couple of years ago, without a doubt," said Border Patrol spokesman Mario Villarreal.

Despite the crackdown, an AP investigation involving interviews with dozens of officials, immigration activists and

migrants in Mexico, California, Arizona and Washington, turned up no evidence that any suspected terrorist has been prevented from coming to America.

Mauricio Juarez, spokesman for the Mexican government's National Migration Institute, told AP that Mexico hasn't arrested a single terrorist suspect heading north. And he said the United States hasn't informed Mexico of any arrested on the U.S. side — something it presumably would do.

Spokesmen for the U.S. Border Patrol, the FBI and Immigration and Customs Enforcement say national security guidelines prevent them from saying whether any suspected terrorists have been arrested trying to cross the border from Mexico.

Robert Bonner, commissioner of the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection, said "hundreds of people per year from ... interest countries, such as Pakistan" are turned back at border crossings from Mexico, but he didn't give any indication of how many were terrorists.

Several Border Patrol agents along the Arizona-Mexico border said that although they have become increasingly vigilant toward the possibility of terrorists using established people-smuggling routes, they have found none.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Mountain lion babies freed from railroad track

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — A railroad inspector and a game warden used the age-old trick of a little hot water to free three mountain lion kittens stuck to a railroad track.

Pat O'Rourke was inspecting the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe main line near Butte, Friday when he saw three kittens frozen to the tracks. One was on its back and one was stuck by its tail. The third had a paw on a railroad spike and a belly on the track.

The young mountain lions apparently had crossed Silver Bow Creek in the 10-degree Fahrenheit before walking onto the steel rails and getting stuck.

Abilene expects to be hot spot for wind energy

ABILENE, Texas (AP) — Windmills have been a fact of life in West Texas for generations since they helped settlers tame the parched land by drawing water from deep wells to the ground. Now officials in Abilene and other cities hope those windmills can power the region's next big business.

"My guess is within the next couple years, Abilene will be a hot spot for wind energy," said Mike Sloan, executive director of the Texas Wind Coalition, an industry group of wind power developers and manufacturers. Depleting natural resources, increasing pollution concerns and a growing need for home-grown fuel sources have spurred interest in wind power.

Textbooks at center of evolution debate

By April Castro
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — Texas will be under the microscope next week in the fight over teaching evolution in public schools as the State Board of Education votes on adopting biology textbooks that have been at the center of the debate.

The board meets Thursday and Friday and is set to consider proposed changes submitted by 11 publishers. The board's decisions — which could determine which textbooks publishers offer to dozens of states — will end a review process that has been marked by months of heated debate over the theory of evolution.

Religious activists and proponents of alternative science urged publishers to revise some of the 10th-grade books and want the board to reject others, saying they contain factual errors regarding the theory of evolution. Mainstream scientists assert that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution is a cornerstone of modern research and technology.

Board members can only vote to reject books based on factual errors or failure to follow state curriculum as mandated by the Legislature.

"There's a bait and switch going on here because the critics

want the textbooks to question whether evolution occurred. And of course they don't because scientists don't question whether evolution occurred," said Eugenie Scott, executive director of the California-based National Center for Science Education.

Among those questioning the textbooks are about 60 biologists from around the country who signed a "statement of dissent" about teaching evolution and said both sides of the issue should be taught.

Any changes to the textbooks will have implications across the country.

Texas is the nation's second largest buyer of textbooks, and books sold in the state are often marketed by publishers nationwide.

One of the most vocal advocates of changing the textbooks is the Discovery Institute, a non-profit think tank based in Seattle. Institute officials have argued at board hearings that alternatives to commonly accepted theories of evolution should be included in textbooks to comply with a state requirements that both strengths and weaknesses are presented.

"These things are widely criticized as being problematic. They aren't criticisms we made up; they're criticisms widely held in scientific community," said Discovery Institute fellow John West.

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— John West
Discovery Institute fellow

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