

While I strongly support the steps taken in the REAL ID Act to strengthen our immigration laws, I remain vigilant, and look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure that American citizens' individual liberties are not infringed upon.

I also want to be aware of and oppose efforts to explicitly create a national ID card which could contain all of a person's personal information.

Finally, in the 108th Congress, I cosponsored S. 1906, the Homeland Security Enhancement Act of 2003, which was introduced by my colleague from Alabama, Senator SESSIONS, and my former colleague from Georgia, Senator Miller, and was also cosponsored by my colleague from Idaho, Senator CRAIG. S. 1906 would give our law enforcement and immigration and border officers the tools and funding they need to do their jobs. More specifically, S. 1906 would: clarify for law enforcement officers that they have the legal authority to enforce immigration violations while carrying out their routine duties; increase the amount of information regarding deportable illegal aliens entered into the FBI's National Crime Information Center database, making the information more readily available to state and local officials; supply additional facilities and beds to retain criminal aliens once they have been apprehended, instead of releasing them, which occurs quite frequently; require the Federal Government to either take illegal aliens into custody or pay the locality or State to detain them, instead of telling those officials to release the aliens because no one is available to take custody; require that criminal aliens be retained until deportation under the Institutional Removal Program, so that they are not released back into the community; mandate that States only give driver's licenses to legal immigrants and make the license expire the same day the alien's permission to be in the country expires.

In conclusion, let's work to improve and enforce our laws and not reward those who break them.

I ask unanimous consent that several pertinent articles be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the New York Times, May 23, 2004]

BORDER DESERT PROVES DEADLY FOR
MEXICANS

(By Timothy Egan)

At the bottleneck of human smuggling here in the Sonoran Desert, illegal immigrants are dying in record numbers as they try to cross from Mexico into the United States in the wake of a new Bush administration amnesty proposal that is being perceived by some migrants as a magnet to cross.

"The season of death," as Robert C. Bonner, the commissioner in charge of the Border Patrol, calls the hot months, has only just begun, and already 61 people have died in the Arizona border region since last Oct. 1, according to the Mexican Interior

Ministry—triple the pace of the previous year.

The Border Patrol, which counts only bodies that it processes, says 43 people have died near the Arizona border since the start of its fiscal year on Oct. 1, more than in any other year in the same period.

Leon Stroud, a Border Patrol agent who is part of a squad that has the dual job of arresting illegal immigrants and trying to save their lives, said he had seen 34 bodies in the last year. In Border Patrol parlance, a dead car and a dead migrant are the same thing—a "10-7"—but Mr. Stroud said he had never gotten used to the loss of life.

"The hardest thing was, I sat with this 15-year-old kid next to the body of his dad," said Mr. Stroud, a Texan who speaks fluent Spanish. "His dad had been a cook. He was too fat to be trying to cross this border. We built a fire and I tried to console him. It was tough."

If the pace keeps up, even with new initiatives to limit border crossings by using unmanned drones and Blackhawk helicopters in the air and beefed-up patrols on the ground, this will be the deadliest year ever to cross the nation's busiest smuggling corridor. The 154 deaths in the Border Patrol's Tucson and Yuma sectors last year set a record.

"This is unprecedented," said the Rev. John Fife, a Presbyterian minister in Tucson who is active in border humanitarian efforts. "Ten years ago there were almost no deaths on the southern Arizona border. What they've done is created this gauntlet of death. It's Darwinian—only the strongest survive."

For years, deaths of people trying to cross the border usually occurred at night on highways near urban areas, killed by cars. But now, because urban entries in places like San Diego and El Paso have been nearly sealed by fences, technology and agents, illegal immigrants have been forced to try to cross here in southern Arizona, one of the most inhospitable places on earth.

They die from the sun, baking on the prickled floor of the Sonoran Desert, where ground temperatures reach 130 degrees before the first day of summer. They die freezing, higher up in the cold rocks of the Baboquivari Mountains on moonless nights. They die from bandits who prey on them, in cars that break down on them, and from hearts that give out on them at a young age.

The mountainous Sonoran Desert, between Yuma in the west and Nogales in the east, is the top smuggling entry point along the entire 1,951-mile line with Mexico, the Border Patrol says. Through the middle of May, apprehensions of crossers in the desert south of Tucson had jumped 60 percent over the previous year. Nearly 300,000 people were caught trying to enter the United States through the desert border since last Oct. 1.

After a four-year drop, apprehensions—which the Border Patrol uses to measure human smuggling—are up 30 percent over last year along the entire southern border, with 660,390 people detained from Oct. 1 through the end of April, federal officials said.

The crossing here, over a simple barbed-wire fence, is followed by a walk of two or three days, up to 50 miles on ancient trails through a desert wilderness, to reach the nearest road, on the Tohono O'odham Nation Indian Reservation, a wedge of desert the size of Connecticut that is overrun with illegal immigrants, or on adjacent federal park or wildlife land. Most people start off with no more than two gallons of water, weighing almost 17 pounds, in plastic jugs. In recent days, with daytime temperatures over 100 degrees in the desert, a person needed a gallon of water just to survive walking five miles.

The desert is littered with garbage—empty plastic jugs, discarded clothes, toilet paper.

"My feet hurt and I'm thirsty, but I will try again after a rest," said Edmundo Saenz Garcia, 28, who was apprehended on the reservation one morning near the end of his journey. His toes were swollen and blistered. He walked in cowboy boots. After being fingerprinted for security, he will be sent back to Mexico, agents said.

Mr. Garcia said he had heard that the new Bush immigration plan, which would grant work visas to millions of illegal immigrants inside the United States and to others who can prove they have a job, was "amnesty," and he wondered why he was arrested. He said he would try to cross again in a few days.

"It's like catch-and-release fishing," Mr. Stroud, the Border Patrol agent, said with a shrug after helping Mr. Garcia with his blisters. "One week, I arrested the same guy three times. If I dwell on it, it can be frustrating."

Agents and groups opposed to open borders say the spike in crossings and deaths are the fault of the Bush proposal, which is stalled in Congress and unlikely to be acted on this year. But it has created a stir in Mexico, they say.

"They've dangled this carrot, and as a result apprehensions in Arizona are just spiking beyond belief," said T. J. Bonner, president of the National Border Patrol Council, which represents about 9,000 agents. "The average field agent is just mystified by the administration's throwing in the towel on this."

Mr. Bonner, who is not related to the border commissioner, said the people were crossing in huge numbers, even at the high risk of dying in the desert, because "they're trying to get in line for the big lottery we've offered them."

With an estimated 8 million to 12 million immigrants in this country illegally—and only a handful of prosecutions of employers who hire them—the southern border is more broken now than at any time in recent history, said Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, a research group opposed to increased immigration.

"We've created an incentive to take foolish risks," Mr. Krikorian said. "In effect, we're saying if you run this gauntlet and can get over here, you're home free."

Bush administration officials say there is only anecdotal evidence, from field agents, that their proposal has caused the spike in crossings. They point to a new \$10 million border initiative and indications in recent weeks that apprehensions have leveled off as evidence that they are getting the upper hand on the Arizona border. It is the last uncontrolled part of the line between Mexico and the United States, they said.

"Unfortunately, there have always been deaths on the border," said Mario Villareal, a spokesman for the Border Patrol in Washington.

It was 3 years ago this month that 14 people died trying to walk across the desert near this small tribal hamlet, dying of heat-related stress in what the poet Luis Alberto Urrea called "the largest death event in border history." Mr. Urrea is the author of "The Devil's Highway" (Little, Brown and Company), an account of the crossing and border policy.

He wrote that the Sonoran Desert here "is known as the most terrible place on earth," where people die "of heat, thirst and misadventure."

To curb deaths, the American government has been running an advertising campaign in Mexico, warning people of the horrors.

"The message is, 'No mas cruces en la frontera,' no more crosses on the border," Commissioner Bonner said in unveiling the