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Allard pleased, Salazars not on use of National Guard

By PETER ROPER
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

President Bush's decision to send National Guard troops to help enforce the U.S. border with Mexico was met with guarded approval from Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., and sharper skepticism from Sen. Ken Salazar and Rep. John Salazar, both Colorado Democrats.

Allard said he was pleased the White House is willing to do more to toughen border control, but said Bush's decision would not affect his own opposition to allowing illegal immigrants legalize their residency through a guest worker program.

"I'm pleased the president has recognized that we need to do more, but we need to keep in mind that many members of the National Guard are already deployed in Iraq and elsewhere," he said. "The National Guard was never intended to be a full-time military commitment, but Guard members have to be trained and sending them to the border to do that may be the best place right now."

Sen. Ken Salazar credited Bush with pushing Senate and House Republicans to enact comprehensive immigration reform, not simply tougher border enforcement - as the House immigration package would do. He was critical of sending National Guard troops to the border, however.

"I am deeply concerned that the militarization of our borders, both to the north and to the south, is a short-sighted strategy, which has far-reaching repercussions on our relationships throughout the Western Hemisphere," he said. "We do not need another short-term fix to the immigration problem, but a long-term, comprehensive solution to

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securing our borders, enforcing our laws and dealing with the human and economic reality of the millions of undocumented workers currently in the U.S."

Rep. John Salazar, who represents Pueblo and the 3rd Congressional District, also said it was a mistake to "militarize" the border with the National Guard.

He faulted the White House and the Republican majority in Congress for not making more Border Patrol agents a budget priority over the past two years. He said sending National Guard soldiers to the border does not remedy that.

"If the administration hasn't planned to pay for our current border patrol needs, how does it plan to fund the additional National Guardsmen?" the congressman said in a statement. "Our military is already stretched thin in Iraq and Afghanistan."

He noted that federal law does not allow U.S. military personnel to make arrests and detain civilians.

"By militarizing the border, we would be expanding into dangerous new territory, when we should be funding and help the border patrol secure the U.S.-Mexico border, " the congressman said.

Bush's speech repeated his call for broad immigration reform - and the White House has long supported creating a guest worker program to allow the 11 million undocumented immigrants to work legally.

Allard and other critics have called such programs an "amnesty" that would reward those workers who violated U.S. laws to get here. They have been pushing for tougher border enforcement first. Asked if the White House decision to send National Guard troops to the border would change his mind about a guest worker program, Allard said he still opposes any amnesty for illegal workers in the country.

"I can't support an amnesty or any program that puts illegal immigrants at the head of the line for legal residency in this country," he said. "Now, if the president offers a guest worker program that doesn't do that, that would let someone work here for a time and then return home, that's something I can consider."



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