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Minutemen Dismiss Bush's Border Plan

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(AP) -- A civilian border watch group considers President Bush's crackdown plan on illegal immigration insufficient and is sticking to plans to start putting up a short border security fence on private land along the Mexican border.

On Monday, the president announced his intent to temporarily deploy up to 6,000 National Guard troops to support the U.S. Border Patrol -- but not conduct patrols themselves -- as part of an effort to gain control of the porous southwestern border with Mexico.

In a nationally televised address, Bush endorsed a temporary worker program and said he wants new, secure identification cards for legal foreign workers; would let illegal immigrants with otherwise clean records pay a fine and start along a path to become citizens and would make employers take responsibility for those they hire.

Chris Simcox, the head of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, said last month that unless military reserves or the National Guard were deployed to the border and the White House endorsed more secure fencing, his group would begin constructing fencing on private land along the border.

Last week, the group said construction would begin May 27 because it was not anticipating any imminent effort to put troops on the border.

On Tuesday, Minuteman spokeswoman Connie Hair reiterated that position, despite the president's announcement to have guardsmen fill in on some behind-the-lines Border Patrol jobs while that agency's force is expanded by 6,000 by 2008.

"This is a token deployment of unarmed and grossly inadequate numbers of National Guardsmen to the border, placing them in the same demoralizing position as the Border Patrol ... outmanned and outgunned against the international crime cartels," Hair said.

"We're now more determined than ever to build it, because this is not by any means putting troops on the border. It's adding more people to the mix who will not be in position to do actual patrols," Hair added.



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Hair said the plan remains to build 50 to 150 feet of a double fence on a privately owned ranch over the Memorial Day holiday weekend.

Nearly 1,000 Minuteman volunteers had signed up on the group's Web site, but probably 300 to 350 will be used to work on the fencing, according to Hair.

Others who turn out at a gathering point in southeastern Arizona will help set up stationary observation posts Friday through Monday along a stretch of the border with Mexico. The observers will watch for and report illegal border crossers to the Border Patrol.

Hair said the president could well be placing those National Guard troops who are to be assigned to build roads along the border in a perilous situation, where they potentially could come under fire from criminal elements across the international boundary.

"From everything we can tell, they're going to be unarmed," she said. "Who will guard the National Guard? If it's the Border Patrol, doesn't that defeat the idea of sending troops to the border in the first place?"

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