

Published: 09.29.2007

Border concerns are focus

Howard Fischer

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

Excerpts from the second day of meetings at the U.S.-Mexico border governors' conference in Puerto Peñasco, Sonora, which ended Friday **Entry bottlenecks**

Governors from both sides of the border lashed out at the U.S. government Friday for not doing more to eliminate the massive backups of people and goods from Mexico into the United States.

Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano charged that delays have created a "parking lot" at many border crossings, and said the border states want more than the promises they've heard before.

"Our federal governments can no longer satisfy us simply by coming to a meeting and giving a speech," she said.

U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said his agency is doing more, including adding more lanes at existing ports of entry, and developing and using high-tech approaches to speed crossings. But Chertoff said the best way for communities to speed international traffic is to come up with some cash to help pay for improvements.

The issue of border delays drew angry comments from several of the governors at an international conference.

Eugenio Elorduy, governor of Baja California, called it "intolerable" that people who need to go to work each day, go to school or simply are visiting the United States are forced to sit in traffic for hours at a time.

Meth trafficking

Border governors issued a joint statement urging their respective federal governments to do more to halt not only the flow of methamphetamines across the border, but also pseudoephedrine, a key ingredient in the manufacture of meth.

But they noted there are limits on what states can do on their own.

The governors want their federal counterparts to spend more time and resources on the states that have the highest importation of not only meth but the precursor chemicals.

The governors also agreed Friday to do more to ensure that prescription drugs purchased by U.S. residents in Mexico are safe and effective.

With more Americans heading to Mexico to fill prescriptions to avoid increasing prices here, they said, at the very least, bilingual materials should be developed to educate consumers about buying drugs in another country.

The governors also want states and others to test the medications that are most often bought by U.S. consumers, with the test results publicized — although there would be no prohibition on buying the drugs even if the tests show they are not exactly as promoted.

VIRTUAL FENCE

U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said glitches delaying construction of the first stretch of a

"virtual fence" in Southern Arizona are being worked out.

Chertoff said the technology is not as cutting edge as it might sound. He said the pieces of the technology, including ground radar and automated cameras, have been around awhile "and they do work."

"The issue that we had was in integrating it together, that the cameras automatically queued onto where the radar was," he said.

Chertoff said problems were "not unexpected," which is why the decision was made to begin with a small section of about 28 miles.

But the secretary said he had just watched a demonstration of unmanned aerial vehicles tracking illegal border crossers and sending images to the Border Patrol command truck.

"So I know the technology works. I just want to make sure that the contractors got it integrated before I accept it," he said.

All content copyright © 1999-2007 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.