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Hispanic legislators to monitor monitors

Lawmakers will keep tabs on border project

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

By Howard Fischer

PHOENIX - A group of Hispanic state lawmakers is going to Cochise County on Friday, at least in part to confront volunteers from the Minuteman Project.

Rep. Ben Miranda, D-Phoenix, said there is a need to present some balance in what is happening in Southern Arizona. He said all the publicity so far has been about how these armed volunteers are needed to keep the border safe.

"Part of being there is to make sure our message is out there," he said.

Miranda said that means showing up at any press conferences or events called by the patrols. And Miranda said he intends to be very visible.

"So long as it's a daytime meeting - and there's no (Ku Klux Klan) hoods out there - I intend to get right in the middle of things," he said. "I intend to demonstrate by my accent that we will not be intimidated."

The lawmakers will be joining others, including migrant right groups, who have vowed to monitor the Minuteman Project, which intends to patrol along a 40-mile stretch of the border.

What's missing

SPACE: The Department of Homeland Security made no increases to bed space to accommodate the expected increase in illegal entrant apprehensions.

UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES: The program is being evaluated to see if the \$1 million and more UAVs are worth the cost of using to patrol the border.

INTERIOR REPATRIATION: The program flew deportees back into deep Mexico at a cost of \$13 million. Last year, about 14,000 people, or 12 percent of Tucson Sector apprehensions, used the flight home option.

All that resulted Wednesday in Gov. Janet Napolitano urging calm to prevent confrontations.

"People are entitled to exercise their First Amendment rights and entitled to assemble," she said. "That's why you can't stop the Minutemen from coming, even though, from a law enforcement perspective, it's worrisome to have untrained people, potentially armed, performing what should be a law enforcement function."

The governor said those who want to keep an eye on the Minutemen also have the same rights to assemble.

"Everybody's just going to have to keep calm heads this weekend and over the coming weeks and we'll get through that," Napolitano said.

But the governor said she has no plans to send more Department of Public Safety officers to the area to preserve calm or keep the two sides apart. She said that if Cochise County Sheriff Larry Dever "needs additional help, we will make that assistance available."

The governor's offer of help is appreciated, said Cochise County Sheriff's Department spokeswoman Carol Capas, but for now, there is no plan to take her up on that offer.

"We have a contingency plan in place for any type of major incident that may come up," said Capas. "The sheriff's plan is to continue to do business as usual, to continue to provide police protection for Cochise County citizens and for any visitors."

She said anyone with questions or information related to the Minuteman project can contact the Sheriff's Department at 1-520-432-9501.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

- Current, additional elements in the battle to control the U.S.-Mexico border.

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23



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