

Published: 08.26.2005

## Napolitano OKs border role for DPS

**By Howard Fischer**  
*CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES*

PHOENIX - With a new state law as ammunition, Gov. Janet Napolitano is clearing the way to have Arizona state police start hunting down people smugglers.

Napolitano said Thursday that she had agreed to make Department of Public Safety officers available to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The governor said she is accepting proposals made to her earlier this week by U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff for state help, adding that the joint efforts may be only the beginning.

"We're going to keep looking for other things we can do to start securing that border," she said.

One part of the plan involves having four DPS officers be part of an undercover task force focused on catching smugglers. ICE already operates two such units in Arizona.

In a letter to Napolitano earlier this week, Chertoff said prior efforts to put DPS officers into an ICE-led unit have been rebuffed by state officials.

But Napolitano said Thursday, after reviewing Chertoff's letter, that the idea was acceptable.

Part of what may have changed is state law.

Napolitano has consistently said she doesn't want state and local police to enforce federal immigration laws. That, she said, is the job of the federal government.

But the governor noted that a new state law that took effect earlier this month makes human smuggling a violation of Arizona law.

DPS spokesman Rick Knight said his agency has worked with federal agents in the past on specific projects. But he said this is the first time officers will be assigned expressly to combat the people-smuggling business.

Napolitano also gave her blessing to Chertoff's other main proposal: having DPS officers working with the U.S. Border Patrol at stationary and roving checkpoints.

Chertoff said he is particularly interested in having state help on Interstate 10 in the Casa Grande area, as well as on Interstate 8 near Gila Bend. The idea, he said in his letter to Napolitano, is "integrated enforcement efforts."

In this case, though, DPS officers would not be under federal control. Instead, Chertoff said, they would operate "in tandem, and in separate vehicles" from Border Patrol officers.

Knight said the agencies already work cooperatively. He said details still need to be worked out to see what else can be done by DPS patrol officers.

He stressed that DPS officers will not be arresting people on federal immigration law violations, saying state officers have not been trained in that area.

Napolitano on Thursday called the new efforts "a start" at dealing with the problem of illegal border crossers.

"I'm delighted to see the federal government finally making some firm commitments into Arizona," she said. "We need to do a lot more."

Gubernatorial press aide Pati Urias said a Thursday phone conversation between Napolitano and Chertoff was productive. And Russ Knocke, who works for Chertoff, said the talks are part of an "ongoing process to find the best ways state and federal agencies can work together."

There are other issues still on the table.

One is what role - if any - the DPS will play in transporting illegal immigrants.

Napolitano had offered to have a dozen DPS officers trained in federal immigration law, and then pair them up with Border Patrol agents. These teams then would go out when local police come across large groups of illegal entrants.

She said the new patrols would help alleviate the problem that exists when the Border Patrol reports it has no officers available to pick up illegal entrants arrested by local police. That forces what Napolitano calls a "catch and release" policy.

Chertoff, however, said he is more interested in the DPS doing the transportation itself, freeing up his Border Patrol officers for other jobs.

And Knight said the state is still evaluating Chertoff's offer to invite the DPS to put a full-time liaison in ICE's Phoenix office and the Border Patrol Tucson office.

Chertoff said such a move would "ensure consistent daily coordination and communication between the state and Department of Homeland Security at both the component and departmental level."

All content copyright © 1999-2005 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.