

Published: 01.18.2005

## Arizona lawmakers seek to curb migrants' cost

**By Jacques Billeaud**  
*THE ASSOCIATED PRESS*

PHOENIX - Frustrated over the country's failed immigration policies, some members of the Arizona Legislature are trying to chip away at the massive problems caused by people sneaking across the border - a burden they say the federal government isn't adequately confronting.

While their proposals focus on only a few elements of the problem, the lawmakers say their approaches would help reduce the human and financial costs of illegal immigration in Arizona, the busiest illegal entry point on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Rep. Russell Pearce, a Mesa Republican, has proposed requiring that government employees verify the immigration status of applicants for public benefits such as housing and giving local police agencies the power to investigate and detain illegal immigrants.

Democratic Rep. Steve Gallardo of Phoenix wants to make human trafficking a crime that county and state officials in Arizona can pursue, much as federal authorities have targeted migrant smugglers, known as "coyotes."

"We never gave them tools or the means for law enforcement to go after some of the coyotes," Gallardo said.

More than any other state in recent years, Arizona has been dogged by a heavy flow of illegal immigrants after the government tightened enforcement in El Paso and San Diego during the mid-1990s.

Even though immigrants provide the American economy with cheap labor, border states shoulder huge health care and education costs for illegal workers and their families.

The federal government has launched a crackdown on migrant smuggling operations in metropolitan Phoenix and deployed more federal agents and equipment to the border.

The crackdown was credited with reducing violent crime in Phoenix, though it has prompted smugglers to operate in other Arizona communities and Southwestern states.

Angela Kelley of the pro-illegal-immigrant National Immigration Forum, said the Arizona lawmakers' proposals would not reduce illegal immigration and would burden state and local governments. "You can keep putting these penalties on people, but it doesn't make us safer."

The larger solution is for Congress to make it legal for would-be crossers to work here temporarily and let their families visit, Kelley said.

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.

**Ads by Google**

**Drug Abuse Prevention** • [www.nimcoinc.com](http://www.nimcoinc.com)  
Free DVD Player offer. Educational materials for all ages.

**Positive Action** • [www.positiveaction.net](http://www.positiveaction.net)

An alcohol, tobacco, and drug prevention program all in one.

**Drug Free Youth Program** • [www.ndfyf.org](http://www.ndfyf.org)

Provides Incentives & Rewards For Drug Free Teens. Donate Today!