

Volunteers to patrol border

► Some citizens fear crackpots and vigilante violence.

By **ARTHUR H. ROTSTEIN**
Associated Press

TOMBSTONE, Ariz. — Hundreds of volunteers, some of them armed, are expected to take up positions along the Mexican border Friday and begin patrolling for illegal immigrants — an exercise some fear could attract racist crackpots and lead to vigilante violence.

Organizers of the Minuteman Project said the civilian volunteers, many of whom were recruited over the Internet, will meet first for a rally in this one-time silver mining town, then fan out across 23 miles of the San Pedro Valley to watch the border for a month and report sightings of illegal activity to Border Patrol agents.

Minuteman field operations director Chris Simcox described the project as "the nation's largest neighborhood watch group" and said one of the goals is to make the public aware of how porous the border is.

Jim Gilchrist, a retired accountant from Aliso Viejo, Calif., who organized the project, said that some volunteers will carry handguns, which is allowed under Arizona law, but are being instructed to avoid confrontation, even if shot at.

Still, law enforcement officials and human rights advocates are worried about the potential for bloodshed.

Critics contend the project may attract anti-immigrant racists and vigilantes looking to confront illegal immigrants. At least one white supremacist group has mentioned the project on its Web site.

"They are domestic terrorists that represent a danger to the country and could promote a



Associated Press file

Michael King, a member of the citizen watchdog group American Border Patrol, rides along the U.S.-Mexico border near Cochise County, Ariz., in February. A new operation, the Minuteman Project, calls for armed civilian volunteers to watch for illegal border crossings and report them to the Border Patrol.

major border conflict that will have serious ramifications and consequences," said Armando Navarro, a University of California-Riverside political science professor and coordinator of the National Alliance for Human Rights, made up mostly of Hispanic activists.

Michael Nicley, chief of the U.S. Border Patrol's Tucson sector, said the volunteers are "not the kind of help the Border Patrol is asking for."

Cochise County Sheriff Larry Dever said he fears immigrant smugglers might open fire on the volunteers.

"I wouldn't anticipate that people of that persuasion would act or react any differently to anybody, citizen or law enforcement alike, if they were confronted and felt like their cargo was in jeopardy," he said.

The project's organizers gave assurances the volunteers will be closely monitored. "If it gets to a situation where someone's life is

in danger," said David Helppler, Minuteman security coordinator, "I will end the project."

Project organizers said they expect 800 to 1,000 volunteers. How many may actually show is unclear; similar efforts in the past few years flopped. One of them drew about six people.

On Wednesday, the Homeland Security Department announced that it is assigning 534 additional agents to the porous Arizona border to help keep out potential terrorists and illegal immigrants.

The 370-mile Arizona border is considered the most vulnerable stretch of the 2,000-mile southern border. Of the 1.1 million illegal immigrants caught by the Border Patrol last year, 51 percent crossed into the country at the Arizona border.

Some people in this town nearly 30 miles north of the Mexican border, best known as the site of the 1881 shootout at the OK Corral, are eagerly awaiting the volunteers' arrival.

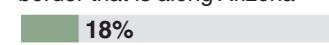
Civilians to take action at border

Hundreds of volunteers, some armed and many recruited over the Internet, will begin patrolling for illegal immigrants Friday along the Arizona-Mexico border.



On patrol in Arizona

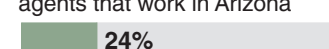
Percentage of the U.S.-Mexico border that is along Arizona



Percentage of illegal immigrants caught by U.S. Border Patrol in 2004 that crossed into Arizona



Percentage of federal border agents that work in Arizona



Sources: ESRI; U.S. Customs & Border Protection AP

Tombstone Mayor Andree De Journett thinks of the volunteers as tourists and said they could boost the local economy.

"I've met five or six of them, they haven't been too bad so far," he said, estimating that 500 extra visitors staying for a month could spend \$10,000 or more locally per day.

Marilynn Slade, Tombstone's city clerk, said the more attention drawn to illegal immigration, the better.

www.minutemanproject.com
www.cbp.gov

Meeting addresses illegal immigration

By **TOM DROEGE**
World Staff Writer

Frustrated with the number of undocumented immigrants in Tulsa, a local group met Wednesday night with officials from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Oklahoma Highway Patrol to discuss enforcement efforts in the state.

"We just want to sound an alarm," said Carol Helm of Immigration Reform for Oklahoma Now, the group that organized the meeting. "We're not here to pull the state apart or make someone's job harder. We are here to educate."

Chris Bentley of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services said estimates showed that Oklahoma had 60,000 undocumented immigrants in 2004, with about 70 percent of them from Mexico.

But advocates of the local Hispanic community say they believe that even more undocumented immigrants are living in Tulsa.

Bentley said about 8.5 million undocumented immigrants were living in the United States in 2004.

During the meeting at Hardesty Regional Library, OHP Chief Gary Adams and Jerry Valentine of the homeland security department's Immigrations Customs Enforcement office in Oklahoma talked about how their agencies are dealing with undocumented immigrants.

Adams said it is not unusual for state troopers to encounter undocumented immigrants through routine traffic stops on the state's highways.

Troopers who believe that they have stopped undocumented immigrants notify ICE agents, who handle interviews and any subsequent deportations, he said.

Adams emphasized that although the system is not perfect, communication between the authorities has improved.

"We have better communication amongst each other," he said. "What we have now is a network that works together."

Valentine, an ICE group supervisor, said his agency's problem is inadequate staffing. ICE has one office in Oklahoma City.

"I have three agents," Valentine said. "If I can get some more agents we will reach out to Tulsa."

Much of what is being done about undocumented immigrants is not publicized, Valentine said, and he noted that he is prepared to begin a public relations effort to better inform residents.

He urged those unhappy with the immigration situation to organize and let their local and state representatives know how they feel.

"You need to fill these chairs up," he said.

About 10 people attended the meeting, along with Susan Tully of the Federation for American Immigration Reform.

Helm, the coordinator of Immigration Reform for Oklahoma Now, said the group formed in March 2004 to oppose "illegal alien invasions of America."

The meeting participants talked on topics ranging from the drain that undocumented immigrants put on the public schools to companies that employ them illegally.

"It's the most critical problem that we face today," said Bill Kohl, citing social, medical and criminal costs. "This problem is going to be won at the ballot box, not at the border."

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