



OPINION

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"Publish and set up a standard; publish and conceal not." Jeremiah 50:2

Eugene Lorton • 1869-1949

Good intentions?



MIKE JONES
Associate editor

Volunteers guard southern border

It's a good idea to have the public aware of possible threats and to enlist help in foiling any attempts to disrupt or damage the country. That's why it's difficult to fault the volunteers who are patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border.

The United States has two long and unsecured borders. One is with Canada and the other is with Mexico. The vulnerability of the southern border is exposed daily by the number of illegal aliens coming into the United States from Mexico.

It is almost impossible for either of those borders to be patrolled thoroughly enough to stop illegal crossings. Federal, state and local law enforcement agencies do not have the manpower or financial means to secure either border 24 hours a day.

From concerns for security has sprung the Minuteman Project. Via the Internet, it has coaxed volunteers to watch for illegal immigrants and smugglers along the U.S.-Mexico border. Its motto is: *Americans doing the jobs Congress won't do. Operating within the law to support enforcement of the law.*

Although the organization denies it, that motto sounds like a vigilante group. The Minuteman Project plainly states on its Web site that it will accept no funding or help from any group that considers itself racist or devoted to the supremacy of one race over another. But, by its actions it seems to be targeting Mexicans. Or at least targeting them by using the foreign terrorist excuse.

The first wave of volunteers stresses that they are there to protect the border from infiltration by illegal aliens, some of whom could be terrorists. They are right about one thing, it would be pretty easy for a group of terrorists to sneak into the United States through Mexico.

That assumes the Mexican government is doing nothing to track possible terrorists who enter Mexico. On the other hand, terrorists have entered this country legitimately without detection.

The threat of terrorists entering the United States by sneaking over the border with Mexico is real. So, as many people watching as possible is welcome.

But groups such as the Minuteman Project



MATT YORK / Associated Press

Kathy Snell, of the Minuteman Project, raises the U.S. flag on the fence on Mexico border near Naco, Ariz.

have been as upset over the number of illegal Mexicans entering the United States as they are terrorists.

The Minuteman Project Web site boasts that it already has hundreds of volunteers monitoring the border. And it claims that a number of illegal aliens have been reported to the Border Patrol. In fact, it says that a group of 18 aliens was reported last week, including an alien from Guatemala. At last check, Guatemala was not a member of the Axis of Evil.

According to accounts from the Associated

Press in Arizona, where many of the illegal aliens cross the border, the volunteers gathered in groups of three or four, spaced out over about every quarter mile. Some were armed and some set up lawn chairs either on the ground or in the backs of their pickup trucks and scanned the horizon with binoculars.

Dave Carpinello, a Denver investment banker — carrying a pistol and wearing a T-shirt that said "I defended the border" — told the AP that he was defending the border against

terrorists. "Anyone and their mother could fly to Mexico and walk right over here. That's a scary thought," he said.

The Minuteman Project has been peaceful so far, according to the Border Patrol. Nevertheless, volunteers cause some problems by accidentally tripping sensors that alert the Border Patrol to intruders. Every time a sensor goes off, the agents must inspect the cause. If it is one of the volunteers, the trip is a waste of time and pulls agents away from other, more important, work.

The Minuteman Project plans to continue its volunteer patrol through April in 24-hour shifts. The volunteers, no doubt, will find a good deal of illegal aliens trying to get into the United States.

Again, civilians being aware of what's happening around them and reporting suspicious or illegal behavior is commendable. But there is the potential for trouble in a volunteer project. The desert is by its very nature desolate. What is to keep the wrong sort of volunteers from becoming their own judge and jury and administer some "justice" that might never be heard of outside the desert?

What happens when a segment of the volunteer group decides that it can do a better job of patrolling the border than the U.S. government? A lone patrolman coming upon a group of armed vigilantes who are not too fond of government agents could spell disaster.

Remember this is a group whose motto is: *Americans doing the jobs Congress won't do.* Let's hope that they adhere strictly to the second part of that motto: *Operating within the law to support enforcement of the law.*

And no matter how much the Minuteman Project proclaims the purity of its goal and its devotion to national security, there is an overriding sense that what it really wants is to keep those brown people out of the United States.

Is there a problem with illegal aliens in this country? Of course. In some states, particularly California and Arizona, they put a tremendous burden on the education and social systems. It's a problem with no easy solution. But what the xenophobes don't comprehend is that the Mexicans, legal and illegal, are doing the work that many Americans consider menial.

Is there a danger of foreign terrorists entering the country through any one of thousands of miles of unsecured borders, both north and south? Yes. But, untrained, armed volunteers patrolling the border is not the answer.

An aware and educated public would be a great help in the search for real terrorists on our soil. But an armed group that seems more concerned about illegal Mexican aliens than foreign terrorists and whose motives might be suspect is not the answer.

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Survey: Habitat homeowners mostly positive

It's obvious from watching the house-raising volunteers of Habitat for Humanity Tulsa that they believe in the value of what they are doing.

Now there is research to show that the intended beneficiaries of all that work — the homeowners — are overwhelmingly pleased with the results.

The University of Oklahoma Applied Research Center has completed the first part of a continuing study on the effect of home ownership on Habitat clients of Tulsa.

Researchers Chan M. Hellman, director of the center, and Pamela S. Pittman, a graduate student, mailed questionnaires to 100 Habitat homeowners and received 43 responses. That in itself was remarkable, Hellman said. A response rate of 10-15 percent was expected.

More than 95 percent of those responding are generally satisfied with their Habitat homes. More than 69 percent strongly agreed.

Among other survey results: Respondents, three-fourths of whom were women, unanimously felt a greater sense of security by owning their homes (78 percent strongly agreed); 95.1 percent said their quality of life has improved since they moved into their homes (58.5 percent strongly agreed); 90.5 percent felt like part of the community since moving into their homes (54.8 percent strongly agreed).

In written responses to open-ended questions, homeowners time after time expressed a sense of accomplishment in owning a home they helped build, pride of ownership and a sense of increased financial security and personal safety.



DAVID AVERILL
Associate editor

Many said they were proud that their children had a yard and bedrooms of their own. Several also noted with pride that their children would someday inherit their homes.

While the responses were in most cases what Habitat staff and volunteers hoped to hear, there were some scattered complaints that should help better serve future homeowners. One example: the need to better communicate homeowners' responsibility for routine maintenance and repair.

Applied research of this type is not intended to divine universal truths about homeownership or Habitat's efforts in general. It is closer to the market research or customer-satisfaction surveys a private company might conduct.

The first survey dealt with how homeowners themselves feel they have benefited. Future research, Hellman said, will address more external, qualitative measures of the impact that homeownership has. For example, what is the relationship between homeownership and children's academic performance?

Habitat for Humanity is an ecumenical Christian ministry whose aim is to provide safe new affordable homes for qualified low-income families in the United States and around the world.

It is not a giveaway. Sponsoring organizations — churches, businesses,



MICHAEL WYKE / Tulsa World file

Deron and Karen Lee outside their Habitat for Humanity home in Tulsa.

professional and civic groups, even families — provide the money and volunteers do most of the labor. Prospective homeowners, who live in substandard and even dangerous housing, must meet certain financial requirements and must work hundreds of hours of "sweat equity" to qualify, and then work alongside the volunteers on their own homes.

They assume interest-free loans and make \$200 a month payments that include principal, taxes and insurance. Principal payments go into a fund that

helps build additional homes.

The OU Applied Research Center at the Schusterman Center in Tulsa, has been in operation less than three years. It is intended to help community service agencies assess the effectiveness of their programs.

Hellman, an assistant professor in the human relations department at OU-Tulsa, is the center's founder and director. Three graduate students work in the center, which so far is fully funded through the university.

The center's potential is enormous.

It can provide a neutral, unbiased yardstick for groups like Habitat to determine if they are accomplishing what they intend, and if they are telling their supporters what they are doing. So far, the news for Habitat Tulsa is good.

(I must note by way of disclaimer that I am involved with Habitat as a volunteer and former board member.)

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