

Congressman Pete Hoekstra

‘A Line in the Sand’

A photo journal of conditions at the U.S.-Mexico border

February 19 & 20, 2003

Introduction

Sometimes, they say, a picture is worth 1,000 words. Instead of a lengthy travel diary, my report on this trip focuses on a few select photographs that tell much of the story behind the loosely restricted U.S.-Mexico border region.

Cadillac native Kristopher Eggle, a 28-year-old resident of the 2nd Congressional District, died as a direct result of hazardous conditions in the area. Serving as a National Park Service officer at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Eggle was killed amid heavy gunfire that broke out between a suspected Mexican drug trafficker, Mexican police and U.S. Border Patrol agents last August.

In February I traveled to the border with a group that included two fellow congressmen, a few media representatives and Kris’ father, Bob Eggle, to highlight this pressing problem of lax security at our nation’s border.

Organ Pipe National Monument is considered the most dangerous national park in the United States because of illegal drug trafficking allowed by loose conditions near the border in southern Arizona. My trip not only covered Organ Pipe, but we also traveled to the nearby Patagonia Mountains in Coronado National Forest. It is an area abounding with newly blazed trails by Mexican drug traffickers, drug drop areas and layover sites.

Photos

Photo One (Coronado National Forest): It is daytime and no one is in sight, so who created all of these footpaths through the Coronado National Forest? They were created by those crossing illegally to seek a better life in the U.S., drug smugglers and other undocumented aliens. It is estimated that through the areas we visit, hundreds of thousands of people illegally enter the country each year.





Photo Two (Mexico): I am standing north of the U.S. border fence, but in what country am I standing: the United States or Mexico? Surprisingly, it is Mexico. Mexican farmers have stolen parts of our border fence and relocated them about 35 feet south to fence in their pastures. In these areas, there is no longer anything separating the two countries.

Photo Three (Loveville Checkpoint): We place this high-tech equipment at border crossing checkpoints to inspect vehicles for drugs and other contraband, but does it effectively catch illegal traffic before it crosses the border? Such modern equipment and U.S. personnel operating that equipment prove very effective in monitoring vehicles and individuals crossing the border through established checkpoints, but only at established checkpoints.



Photo Four (Organ Pipe): How far is this location from the checkpoint highlighted in the previous photo? Only about 1,500 feet. It makes me wonder how serious U.S. officials are about monitoring our border. What a night and day contrast!

Photo Five (Coronado): Was this backpack purchased from your local outdoor sporting goods store? Obviously not, but these ropes and burlap bags were used one time as backpacks to smuggle about 40 to 50 pounds of contraband, most likely marijuana, into the country.



Photo Six (Organ Pipe): This is where Kris Eggle was tragically murdered. It is located about three-quarters of a mile from the Loveville Checkpoint. The U.S.-Mexico border goes from high-tech to non-existent in less than one mile. Here it opens to



the worst types of criminal elements imaginable. Am I exaggerating the violent nature and criminal element near the border? On Thursday U.S. Border Patrol agents chased and apprehended three vehicles painted like those driven by Border Patrol. More than one ton of marijuana was seized!

Photos Seven and Eight (Coronado): If undocumented aliens, drug smugglers, and others trash our national parks, threaten visitors and create an unsafe environment after nightfall, can these parks still be considered national treasures?



Photo Nine (Organ Pipe): What's the law? Read the sign: "All persons and vehicles must enter the United States at a designated port of entry only."

Photos Ten, Eleven and Twelve (Organ Pipe): These are heavily traveled entry points into the United States. Do any of these look like "a designated port of entry?"



Summary

Much of our border with Mexico is little more than a line in the sand. People use it as easy access to a nation that can offer them hope and opportunity. All too frequently, however, it has provided direct access for the worst types of individuals who would like

to harm our nation: drug smugglers, violent criminals and potentially those associated with terrorist organizations.

As a nation guarded by law, we must enforce our immigration laws and protect our borders. In some cases that also means we need to update and reform current laws, but in no way should we ever stand idly by as the laws governing our borders are flagrantly violated.

This photo journal covers just some of the concerns raised by my trip, but it does highlight a key issue facing the United States, and that is whether we are willing to enforce laws necessary for national security.

This journal does not, however, touch on other issues raised by my trip, including:

- the corruption of some Mexican government officials who support illegal traffic crossing the border,
- the suffering of U.S. citizens in the region who have been forced to leave their homes because of dangerous conditions created by loose border security,
- the actions taken by some U.S. citizens to begin their own surveillance of the border area to assist U.S. Border Patrol,
- the likelihood that, unless dramatic steps are taken, the border area will see increased violence against U.S. citizens, especially with smugglers and others becoming more sophisticated in their efforts. They now monitor U.S. law enforcement communications, use automatic weapons and employ modern technology such as night vision goggles.

We cannot just stand by and allow these serious problems to continue.