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Press Briefing on the President's Immigration Reform Plan

Presidential Hall
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10:01 A.M. EDT

MS. HEALY: I just wanted to thank you all for being here. I'm Erin Healy with the White House Press Office. I just want to introduce everyone very quickly. We have Secretary Chertoff from Homeland Security who is here with us today. We also have Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense Paul McHale who is also with us. U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Chief David Aguilar is with us. Chief for the National Guard General Blum is with us. And also, the ICE Assistant Secretary, Julie Myers, is with us who will take your questions, kind of give you the role of the National Guard and Customs.

SECRETARY CHERTOFF: Well, you all heard the President's speech last night. I know you got a briefing yesterday. But we're here to give you some additional information from the perspective of the operators themselves about what we envision, going forward, based on what the President said yesterday.

You've already heard who is with me. I'm going to keep my comments short so you can get an opportunity to ask questions. I know you'd rather drone on at great length, but I'll put some of the burden back on you.

Let me just summarize a couple of points, and then I'm going to ask the others just to talk for a couple moments. First, this President has had, since he took office, a strong commitment to securing the border and dealing with this problem of illegal immigration. And of course, he has experience with this issue going back to his days as governor of Texas. Since the President took office, we've caught and turned back, returned to their country some 6 million people, including about 400,000 with criminal records. The number of Border Patrol agents has increased from about 9,000 to 12,000, and we've increased border security funding by over 60 percent.

When I took the job, one of the things that the President made clear to me was that, although we had made some significant progress in terms of dealing with this challenge at the borders, he was not satisfied with where we were. And so we began the process of looking at this issue in a comprehensive fashion, basically trying to understand the whole system of what fuels the illegal migration business model so we could figure out what our best approach would be to deter it and to really dismantle it.

After we analyzed it, after we spent a lot of time talking to some of the front-line operators like Chief Aguilar, we realized we need to approach it on a number of different fronts. First of all, we needed to add more people. And by the end of 2008, the President has proposed that we more than double the number of Border Patrol as compared with the number that was on duty when he came into office. That would take us to slightly above 18,000 agents.

But boots on the ground is not really enough. You've got to leverage those boots; you've got to make them as effective as possible. And the way to do that is more tactical infrastructure -- things like fences, vehicle barriers and roads -- and as important, next generation technology, the kind of things we use to great effect overseas when we conduct operations, for example, in Asia.

Just this year, the department has had its first unmanned aerial vehicle, which accounted for 23 drug seizures, totaling more than four tons of marijuana, and also resulted in the apprehension of 2,300 illegal migrants. So more of this kind of high-tech is really critical. And that means our SBInet program, which we've issued for bid this past April and which we're expecting to begin to award and start to deploy toward the end of this fiscal year.

But it's not just enough to arrest a million people a year. We have to actually remove them. The goal here is not to arrest and release, it's to arrest and remove, and ultimately, to achieve deterrence because people understand when they're caught they're going to go back home again. And so we've been focused on moving from this old catch and release system to a catch and remove system, and we've made a considerable amount of progress.

But we have more progress we can achieve to get this problem completely turned around.

But, ultimately, if we look at the business model for the illegal migrant, we have to consider the tremendous economic pressure that is driving people into this country. And it is not an economic pressure that can be addressed simply by dealing with more boots on the ground and more technology at the border, itself. We have to look at what's going on in the interior.

One way to think about it is, it's like trying to dam a river. If you build a dam and you don't have a spillway to drain off some of the excess water in a way that's productive, you will eventually have to either keep building the dam higher and higher or the dam will break. We have to have a spillway for some of this economic pressure, and that's a temporary worker program, which allows us to take economic migrants and channel them in a regulated and visible way so we know who they are, so we can track them, and so we can bleed some of that pressure that the Border Patrol is facing at the border.

And in order to make that work we also have to have a stick, and that's tough interior enforcement. And as you know, we've begun a process of applying criminal penalties to employers who are flagrantly violating the immigration laws by systematically using illegal migrants to make up their labor force.

All of these pieces we tie together in what we call the Secure Border Initiative, which we announced in November. And since then we've begun to see some of the results of this comprehensive program. ICE has detained and removed more than 17,500 non-Mexicans apprehended at the Southwest border under our expanded use of expedited removal. And with respect to the -- many of the populations of non-Mexicans we catch we have now totally moved from catch and release to catch and return, and we've seen some results in deterrence. We're actually seeing for the first time a seasonal decrease in the number of people from these countries that we're apprehending at the border.

We have one big step left in order to complete this job, and that is to get rid of a 20-year-old court order that is hampering our ability to use expedited removal with respect to people from El Salvador. And we have legislation that members of Congress have introduced that would help us achieve that.

We're acting against the financial infrastructure of human smuggling and trafficking organizations, and ICE is also using fugitive operations teams to arrest more than 44,000 illegal aliens, including 33,343 fugitives and over 10,000 non-fugitives. More than 20,000 of these people arrested by these ICE teams have criminal records. And as I said, we anticipate at the end of this year beginning the process of putting online this next generation of technology.

What the President did last night is put on the turbo chargers in dealing with this focused, anti-illegal migrant effort that we've got, on a comprehensive basis. And if we take advantage of this, and if we move comprehensively in Congress to build the entirety of the program, we can be -- we can have a transformative effect on an immigration problem and an illegal migration problem that has plagued this country for over 20 years.

Now I'd like to turn it to Paul McHale.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY McHALE: Good morning. The task of maintaining the integrity of U.S. international borders is assigned to the Department of Homeland Security. The deployment of military forces along the Southwest border will be in support of the Department of Homeland Security. The military forces, I think as you know, will be drawn largely from the National Guard -- I'm joined today by Lieutenant General Blum, who is the Chief of the Guard Bureau -- and all National Guard forces will be under the command and control of the governor in whose state the forces are operating.

The initial commitment will be for up to 6,000 military forces on a rotational basis for a period of up to 12 months. Military support will not exceed 3,000 personnel during a possible second year of deployments. The Department of Defense will pay the costs on a reimbursement basis.

The missions will include, for example, surveillance and reconnaissance, engineering support, transportation support, logistics support, vehicle dismantling, medical support, as noted by Secretary Chertoff, barrier and infrastructure construction, road building, and linguistic support.

DOD -- I want to emphasize this -- will play no role in the direct apprehension, custodial care, or security associated with those who are detained by civilian law enforcement authorities. Law enforcement along the border will remain a civilian function. The National Guard missions will be substantially similar to the annual training missions executed as part of our counter-drug program along the Southwest border during the past two decades. The difference is that the size of the force and the commitment of resources will be far greater than anything we have done in the past.

The missions assigned to our soldiers and airmen will be directly related to their military skills normally associated with their war fighting and disaster response missions. In addition, DoD and DHS will use civilian contractors when appropriate.

The National Guard deployments along the Southwest border, in support of DHS, is an important but temporary bridge to improve civilian security capabilities. We will draw down our forces consistent with ongoing mission requirements. The men and women in the Department of Defense will work diligently and professionally to support the Department of Homeland Security thereby improving our border security, while providing excellent training to our soldiers and airmen.

As I indicated, I'm joined this morning by Lieutenant General Blum. He really is the operator. He can bring you a much more focused perspective on the kinds of activities and missions likely to be assigned to our men and women in uniform.

Let me turn to him at this point for some brief comments.

GENERAL BLUM: Thank you, Secretary McHale. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. As you know, the National Guard is superbly suited for this mission. We've been doing it for over three decades, just at a much smaller scale. The President and the Department of Homeland Security have asked for military support to a federal law enforcement effort along our border. And the Secretary of Defense -- as Secretary McHale has outlined, has authorized this. We're trained, we're ready to do this, and we're able to do this.

I think what you also need to know, that your National Guard will not do this at the expense of its global mission, that we're performing on a global war on terrorism around the world as part of the Army and the Air Force that we provide the combatant commanders abroad. And we will certainly not do this in any manner that does not make us at least as prepared as we were for Hurricane Katrina last year. In fact, we have more troops available and more equipment and more experience this year than we did last year.

So we are watching that very carefully. There are three glass balls we have to manage or juggle. One is the war on terrorism; one is response to natural disasters and terrorist events here at home. And we can certainly do what is being asked by our Commander-in-Chief with about 2 percent of my force structure.

I think I'll end my comments there and await questions.

SECRETARY CHERTOFF: Chief?

CHIEF AGUILAR: Good morning. As the Secretary stated, what this amounts to is, based on the announcement made by the President last night, this is going to be a tremendous enforcement support partnership. This is a partnership that we have had for over 20 years with the National Guard, counter-drug. We have done a tremendous job jointly in those past 20 years. We are now moving toward national security, border security.

One of the most critical pieces that the National Guard will be bringing to border enforcement is the engineering support. As the Secretary stated, we have a need for personnel. We will be doubling by the end of calendar year '08 the number of Border Patrol agents pre-9/11; technology, which the Secretary spoke about, through SBInet that will be commencing very quickly; and then the need for tactical infrastructure. That is where the expertise of the National Guard will bring some tremendous force multipliers.

I brought with us some static displays that actually shows some of the bollard fencing that is in place that has been built by the actual National Guard tactical infrastructure, and where it is needed.

One of the things that you will notice is that the Border Patrol is operating in very rural areas of our nation right now. Those rural areas have a need for tactical infrastructure and technology. And again, I want to reiterate that the support partnership is critical here. Personnel enforcement will be done by Border Patrol. But the support for tactical infrastructure engineering and technology will be a tremendous force multiplier.

Now, as we all know border enforcement is but one piece of the comprehensive approach. The other piece relates to ICE and interior enforcement for that. I'll pass it on to Assistant Secretary Myers.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY MYERS: Thank you. As the President's speech and Secretary Chertoff's comments make clear, robust interior enforcement, as well as additional detention capacity are critical parts of a comprehensive immigration strategy. The additional 4,000 beds that we're proposing to use through the end of fiscal year '06 will greatly aid us in our efforts to end catch and release along the Southwest border. But beds alone are not enough. The President has called upon us to use them more creatively and to be more careful with our resources, and we will continue to do so.

In addition, as Secretary Chertoff noted, we will work to direct our work site enforcement efforts by targeting our efforts on unscrupulous employers. We've learned too well from the old INS days that simple administrative sanctions are not enough.

Finally, we will seek to build relationships and enhance relationships with state and locals by allowing them into our task forces and working with them on targeted enforcement actions.

Thank you.

SECRETARY CHERTOFF: All right, we'll take questions. If you will identify yourself and tell us who

you are directing a question to.

Q I have a question for General Blum, please. General, as this plan was being put together, what argued against having the National Guard do this on a federal status? And, also, why are you doing the two-week rotations, such a short rotation? Isn't that a pretty inefficient way of doing it?

GENERAL BLUM: Let me address this in turn. First of all, we are doing in a federal status. We are going to be performing these missions in U.S. Code Title 32; that is a federal status. That's when your National Guard is federally funded, has all the rights and entitlements -- the Army National Guard soldiers and airmen have all the rights and entitlements of any other federal uniformed person. The only different in Title 32 -- and it was selected for that code -- is that the National Guard would remain under the control of the governors of the affected states, which everyone came to a conclusion was the best way to do it.

The second part of your question is a little bit complex, but I think it bears examination. We routinely, every year, require each and every member to train for at least 15 days of annual training. That is a focused training period where we focus on their military specialty -- so if they're a medic, they are practicing life-saving medical care. If they're a bulldozer operator or a heavy equipment operator, they're operating heavy equipment.

Every year, Bob, we try to take their military specialty and apply it and leverage that training to get some operational goodness out of it. So, in the past, some of these bollard fences that you see were actually built by National Guard engineers on two-week rotations in their annual training period in Title 32, and they've had some great success with this program for almost 25 years now.

So the only thing that we're going to be doing different is we will be doing this in a much more comprehensive and focused manner on a much grander scale than we've done up to now, and this will, hopefully, set the conditions for the Customs and Border Patrol law enforcement agencies to do an even more effective job than they're able to do now because of the lack of infrastructure, or the lack of medical support, or the lack of communication support, or the lack of some aviation assets, or surveillance platforms or sensors, or the lack of some additional support personnel to help them.

Now, it is very important to know that Chief Aguilar and the Border Patrol and the Customs agents are not going to be meeting new strangers every two weeks. There will be a continuity force that will be in there for the duration and they will come out of the affected states, as well.

Q How many is that? How many?

GENERAL BLUM: Well, as many as we need. But the leadership and the normal continuity people will be there for basically the duration of the operation, at least long-term. The people whose faces and names will change every two or three weeks -- and we're looking at a three-week rotation for this for those that come from outside the affected states, because people will be traveling from across the country so they'll have to require some travel time; they'll need about a two or three-day, what we call a right-seat ride, so that they know what right looks like -- they know the rules of use of force, the rules of engagement, they understand what -- a clear briefing on the terrain and the area they're operating in or

any peculiarities. And they will also meet with the law enforcement agency that they're going to be supporting so they know clearly what they're working on.

So the dozer operator may change every two or three weeks, or the medic may change every two or three weeks, but the people that are coordinating that and working the project will remain in place. And they will be under the direction of joint force headquarters in each state, in California, Texas, and Arizona and New Mexico. And so there will be long-term relations and continuity of effort there.

It's not a one-size-fits-all thing, but we're going to leverage very heavily the Guard, using their -- they already have to do annual training, and we're going to see where it makes sense to take those skills and, instead of having them perform annual training just for the sake of practicing their skills in some wilderness area, we'll put them to operational use on the border.

Q General Blum and Secretary McHale, you said that the cost will be reimbursable. Could you explain how that works, and what the costs are expected to be? And, General Blum, you just said -- you talked about the use of force and the rules of engagement. Under what circumstances do you think that you would have National Guard that would need to worry about that? Because what you've been discussing here is that they wouldn't be engaged in capturing people or in holding prisoners.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY McHALE: By Wednesday of this week, we will receive from the Department of Homeland Security a more detailed list of mission requirements in the execution of which DHS hopes to obtain DoD support. We anticipate we will provide that support, and we think it will be in the mission sense of the types that I described a little bit earlier.

I would emphasize what General Blum has said to you, and that is, we're building upon a successful series of missions that we have executed routinely using annual training forces back to at least 1989. These are counter-drug missions of the very type that we now anticipate we will be executing in support of DHS as they leave their mission requirement for enhanced border security.

We don't know precisely what that list is going to look like on Wednesday, but we have a sense of what it's going to look like. And we're in the process now of coming up with cost estimates that would allow us to seek reimbursement from an appropriate interagency partner, perhaps from DHS, perhaps by some other means.

We don't know exactly what those costs are going to be, but they'll relate to the pay and allowances for the soldiers who are involved; the unanticipated costs related to operations and maintenance, to include equipment replacement, because the wear- and-tear on equipment that inevitably will occur during the execution of these missions.

And then, lastly, while we expect that the vast majority of the force, nearly all of it, will be drawn from the National Guard, performing two- or three-week annual training duty, there is a possibility that in certain niche capabilities we would use active duty Title 10 military forces, and, obviously, there would be costs involved in the utilization of those active duty personnel, as well.

We're trying to come up with cost estimates now. That's the process. And by Wednesday, or actually

shortly after Wednesday, we'll have a clearer picture of exactly what those costs are going to be.

Q Is it going to be 100 percent reimbursable?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY McHALE: We hope so.

Q And, General Blum, on the rules of engagement?

GENERAL BLUM: The rules of engagement and the rules of use of force are absolutely essential. Any time you put uniformed military personnel in an operational role in the United States of America, they have to meet the intent of the Constitution. The four Attorney Generals of the affected states are working with the Judge Advocate and my General Counsel and the Department of Defense General Counsel and others to make sure that we have a rules of use of force and a rules of engagement that are appropriate and are consistent across all four states, even though we will be very sensitive to the state laws.

We have done an early examination of the state statutes, and so far we see no disconnects, we see no contradictions, and we don't anticipate any problems in this area. But it is something that must be addressed, Pam, because it's very important that soldiers know what the expectations are and what the rules are for the area they're operating in.

Q For Secretary Chertoff. I guess you haven't indicated when the rollout will be for the National Guard, when they'll actually begin physically. And also, are you concerned about the political repercussions of this? I know you have given reassurances to the Mexican government that this is not militarizing the border. However, in Mexico the reactions have been very negative, and they're even calling to withdraw the Mexican ambassador here. Can you address those two issues?

SECRETARY CHERTOFF: Well, first of all, I think we're envisioning the possibility of beginning the rollout in June. Bear in mind, it's not going to happen simultaneously; we're not going to put 6,000 National Guard on the border in one day. But the process should begin in June.

As you know, there's been conversation between high levels of the United States government and high levels of the Mexican government. I'm not aware of a huge groundswell of opposition or any serious call for the recall of the ambassador.

Let me put this in context. We have used the National Guard and the military in support of the Border Patrol for about two decades, so this is not new. In fact, there are constantly joint discussions and joint reviews undertaken on both sides of the border, including military elements on both sides of the border. And the Mexican military, from time to time, acts in support of the Mexican police. So I don't think what we're doing here is a departure in kind from things that we've done previously.

Both countries, I think, have an interest in maintaining security on both sides of the border, and, obviously, you can always find a few people who are going to speak in extreme tones, but I think anybody who looks at what we're doing in terms of what the reality is, in terms of what the history is,

will see that it is no threat to what has been an increasingly cooperative and friendly relationship on these matters in both countries.

GENERAL BLUM: Let me add to that, if I might. For those of you that may not know, for about two decades we've had a Southwest border conference -- border states conference. Those states are not just the United States of America. It's not just Texas and Arizona and New Mexico and California. It's also the northern border states of Mexico. And one of the reasons the National Guard was selected and chosen for this is because we have a longstanding relationship with many of the National Guardsmen in Texas and New Mexico and Arizona and California, with many of the military members and the civic leaders and the governors that are in Mexico.

So these will not be strangers. They will be people that can build on already existing relationships. And we are taking an already existing template that everyone has become very comfortable with for over 20 years, and we're just trying to expand the capability that we have been dedicating to that geographic area and intensify it.

So this is -- I don't want to say this is business as usual, but it's more business -- but it's usual business done at a little bit more expanded pace.

SECRETARY McHALE: As of yesterday we had approximately 400 National Guardsmen engaged in exactly these kinds of missions in support of the traditional counter-drug program along the Southwest border. So what we're looking at is a much more robust commitment in terms of personnel and resources, but to mission sets that have been with us for the most part for nearly two decades. We're going to be doing what we have done in the past, but on a much larger scale and more effectively, in order to provide a transition to improve civilian capabilities a little bit further down the line.

CHIEF AGUILAR: One of the things that I think needs to be mentioned to that question, Mr. Secretary, if you don't mind, is that I think that the efforts that are going to be accelerated are going to impact very negatively on one group that we don't ever talk about, and that's the criminal organizations that are literally operating, in some cases, with impunity. This tactical infrastructure, the engineering, the force multiplication effort is going to help in negatively impacting on those criminal organizations that today are causing deaths of Mexicans, that are causing danger to both populations on both sides of the river in the U.S. and in Mexico. That is what's critical to understand here also -- Managing the border, bringing control to the border and border security.

Q Mr. Secretary, in the case of Mr. McHale, I understand the Secretary of Defense for Mexico was recently here. Did you talk to him about this? Do you have any commitment of the Mexican military to support on their side through their law enforcement agencies in order to provide better security to the border?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY McHALE: There was some discussion with General Vega on the proposal that has now been announced by the President of the United States, but that information was provided to General Vega solely that he would be informed as to what it was we would likely do, why we would be doing it, and an emphasis upon the mutual interest that Mexico and the United States has in maintaining the integrity of our common border.

There was no discussion of joint activities. There was no request for an integration of those activities on either side of the border. We simply provide to General Vega as a courtesy a preliminary review of the mission as it was evolving.

Q Back to General Blum for a second. I think we're all trying to picture sort of the logistics of this. How big are, sort of, the individual unit sizes that will be moving three weeks at a time? And, again, I think we're getting a picture that the airports down there are going to be pretty busy, with every two or three weeks a new batch of X number of people coming in and going out. You don't seem concerned about that as a problem, but it does seem sort of just logistically -- the numbers are complicated. Why not just, you know, mobilize a unit for six months and send them down there, like you would to Iraq?

GENERAL BLUM: Well, that's certainly an option, and if we find that that's the best option available to us, if the state of Arizona or California or Texas or New Mexico decide to do that with one of their units, we'll entertain that.

But here's the delicate balance we're trying to maintain. We're talking about a citizen soldier force. We're talking about people that have jobs, people that have families. And we are trying to balance that. We're trying to not interrupt the normal op tempo or their activity level that they would reasonably expect. The only thing that we're really going to do is change the location of where they were going to do their training.

And as far as airports being overloaded, I don't think so. Many of these people will actually drive there, or be bused in there probably by commercial buses. The intent early is to determine what equipment will be needed to support this mission, put it in place and leave it -- and not rotate the equipment to, number one, make sure the equipment is in place on time and we have no gaps in the capabilities that we're able to deliver. Secondly, it reduces the costs of moving that equipment back and forth over the country. So we'll put a maintenance package in there and we'll rotate the people on a set of equipment that is determined to be the equipment necessary to support the mission at hand. I hope that answers the question.

Q Just the question about how big are the units we're talking about?

GENERAL BLUM: The units that we generally do are modular size units which -- they're roughly 100-man units, but some could be as high as a 500-man unit. It depends on what capability Chief Aguilar needs for us to support. For instance, if it's an engineer unit, it could be an engineer company -- that's about 100 people. It could be an engineer battalion, and that could be about 500 people. It could, in fact, be a brigade, which could be 2,500 or 3,000 people. We'll have to look at what they want us to do over what time line, and then, having 3,500 people there and you can only get 200 of them on the equipment at a time doesn't argue very well for bringing a big group in -- it actually argues for exactly what I'm talking about, a rotational force.

Let me give you something that I think you all can relate to. If you were building a home project and you called a contractor in, you want to see that same foreman and you want to see the same contractor and you want to see the same design person all the time. But if they rotated different

painters or different plasterers or different bricklayers or cement finishers or roofers, you don't care, as long as the quality of the work is done and the intent is met, and that your contract is met. And I think that's the same way we're going to approach this particular mission.

Q If I could ask a Border Patrol question. I'm with the Watertown Daily Times in New York. I'm not entirely clear on how you can beef up the Southern border by the numbers that you're talking about without impacting what you're doing on the Northern border, where you're also under pressure to add people on. And if I understand correctly, no one starts at the Northern border until they've already worked the Southern border. So how do you balance those two things and meet the demands on the Northern border?

CHIEF AGUILAR: Well, one of the things that we must not forget is that we have been adding resources into the Border Patrol organization as a whole over the last four or five years. By doing that, we have, in fact, been augmenting the Northern border. By augmenting and enhancing our capabilities on the Southern border, that actually allows us to continue enhancing the Northern border from the Southern. It's critical that this group understands that, yes, all of our agents begin on the Southern border, but we transfer them up north after they become experienced and journeyman agents, after about a three- or four- or five-year period. So by enhancing and accelerating our capabilities on the Southern border, that will also indirectly equip us and enhance our capabilities to go north even faster.

Q Do you have any early estimates on what percentage of the personnel you will need is already in these four states, and what percentage will be coming from elsewhere?

GENERAL BLUM: California has about 15,000 available troops this morning. The other states -- Texas has about 15,000 available today because they have a brigade in Iraq. So they still have 15,000 -- it's one of our larger National Guards. New Mexico is smaller, and Arizona is somewhere about 8,000. They all have over 90 percent of -- except for Texas right now

-- has over 90 percent of their force available for them. Many of these states have asked for the option to try to do it with their own people for as much as they're able to do, at least in the early stages of this, and not bring in outside elements until later. We're going to accommodate that kind of flexibility.

Texas absolutely is going to have to carefully look at its force structure because it's very prone to hurricane season and has to be able to respond to that, as well as this mission, simultaneously. So we'll take appropriate forces with the right capabilities to put them -- and that's the genius, in my view, of having each state develop their own state plan in concert to support this effort.

Q Is the hope that, to a large percent, you'll be able to do this with forces already in those states and not have to mov people from elsewhere?

GENERAL BLUM: Yes, sir. That is the expectations and the desires of the adjutants general of those four states that I've talked to as recently as yesterday, and that's what they will try to do to the extent they can. They may not have all of the capabilities that are required to be able to sustain it over the duration of this mission, and they may have to go externally to get them. But if they can do it from their own citizen soldiers and airmen from their own state, that's preferable.

Q Mr. Secretary, I'm curious, this plan seems to rely on the cooperation of governors -- that might even be putting it lightly. Yet a lot of the -- a few of the governors, or three out of the four, I think, said that they definitely weren't very closely consulted. So have the talks at least been on a staff level, and do you expect the governors to go along with this?

SECRETARY CHERTOFF: I know General Blum indicated he's spoken to the adjutants general. I spoke to the governors yesterday. One of the things I'd emphasize is we have done this for years, so that the idea of bringing National Guard in to support Border Patrol is not new. Governors are used to this. A number of the governors have asked for this over time. We obviously will consult with them to make sure that we are not in any way disrupting or impeding their ability to use the National Guard for other purposes, including, if necessary, for disaster relief.

So this is not some -- a new mandate that's now been pressed upon the states. Rather, it is an amplification of something that we've got a lot of experience in.

GENERAL BLUM: The adjutants general that I spoke to, which are appointed by the four governors, so they have a very close working relationship with their governor, all feel that the governors feel sufficiently consulted now, and feel very comfortable with what is being proposed. In some cases -- I wouldn't want to speak for the governors, but I will tell you that most of them are absolutely enthusiastically welcoming this kind of a response because many of them have advocated this for some time.

Q This is a question for Chief Aguilar. A couple of months ago you told the House Homeland Security Committee that you all could only -- your academy could only handle about 1,500 agents a year. What has changed to allow you guys to ramp up to the level that the President is talking about in those two months?

CHIEF AGUILAR: Well, a couple of things have changed. One is, of course, when I made that statement, I also made the statement that next year we would be ramping up to 2,300, and the year after that we were looking to go up to 2,800 per year. As a part of the funding that we're looking at, we are getting money to basically build on to our academy, so the capacity we're looking to build over the next two-and-a-half years will be such it will accommodate our growth to the 9,000 agents -- or the 18,000 agents by the calendar year '08.

Q And what will be the maximum number that you envision yearly, a year?

CHIEF AGUILAR: The flow-through at the academy that we will require and we will have capability for will be about 4,500 through the academy, to net the numbers we need. The net, of course, is 3,000 in the second year of this effort.

Q I was fortunate enough to spend some time along the Southern border just a few weeks ago. And speaking to some of the border agents there, they say that they see the same people over and over again, that they're bused back, say, for instance, to Mexico, and then they return just a few days later. How will the presence of the Guard make any difference in deterring these people from coming and

coming just to return again?

SECRETARY CHERTOFF: A couple of elements there. Let me break it into two groups. There are people who come from outside of Mexico. To the extent we can get those people back to their home countries, I think it's much harder for them to make their way back.

The problem of recidivism is a problem largely with people from Mexico, and particularly people who are dropped off, really, on the other side of the border. There are a couple of ways we can respond to that. One is, we want to encourage increased interior repatriation. That allows us, with the permission of the Mexican government, to get people who are willing to do so to be returned back to the interior, and that breaks the connection with the gangs.

But at the end of the day, what's going to work with deterrence is convincing these people that they will be caught again and again and again. And that will also affect the business model of the coyotes who are bringing them across.

But I want to tie it back to temporary worker because the fact of the matter is, if you have people who are willing to try eight, 10, 12 times, if there's a way to take those people who only want to come for a legitimate purpose -- seasonal work or temporary work -- and to put them in a program where they will be able to do that work, and we'll be able to regulate them and know who they are, and monitor them when they come and go out of the country, that will bleed off a lot of that pressure that is being placed on the Border Patrol. And if you're not chasing the same person over and over and over again, you have more opportunity to pursue the really bad guys that we definitely want to keep out of the country.

Q Mr. Secretary, Chief Aguilar, you talk about a long-term solution being the technology. But programs like ICE or American Shield, identity card programs and verification systems, that costs hundreds of millions or billions of dollars in the last few years without clear results. And why should the public or Congress think that this time is any different and it will work?

SECRETARY CHERTOFF: That's a really good question -- meaning it's a question I'm looking forward to answering. I actually went back, when we talked about doing this, and looked at some of the IG reports on the prior programs. We've designed this procurement to be what we call an integrated procurement, meaning we're not just going to say, oh, this looks like some neat stuff, let's buy it and then put it on the border. Rather, we're going to say to the integrator who makes a successful proposal, here's what we have by way of resources, here's what the challenge is, here's what the strategy is, talk to the operators. Then you have to look at putting together an integrated technology package, using all the kinds of equipment that's out there that you can choose from -- pick the best equipment, but it has to be presented to us as something that will be fully integrated with the operators. So that, for example, we won't have the problem of sensors that are not

fully integrated with the operators, so that, for example, we won't have the problem of sensors that are not linked to the cameras, so that when you get a sensor hit, the camera turns, and you can detect whether, in fact, you've got an animal or you've got a human being.

So the key to making this work is, operator input in designing what we are looking for, operator input in

terms of designing the constraints, and requiring that the package that would come forward be an integrated package, rather than buying a lot of little different items and then trying to tie them up together.

Q Mr. Secretary, if I've understood everything I've heard, you don't yet know what missions the 6,000 National Guardsmen will do, you don't know who is going to pay for them, you don't know what the rules of engagement will be for them, you don't know what size units there will be or how long -- whether they'll be two-week or six-month deployments, and you don't really know exactly which equipment they're going to have. So my question is, how long have you been working on this?

SECRETARY CHERTOFF: I guess that's what they call a loaded question. And I guess you haven't understood what we've said, so I'm going to try to make it really clear. We know the general set of mission assignments they will be required to perform. As we talked about, there's very specific granular things, what unit is going to go where. We're in the process this week, as we have been previously -- we have a whole set of mission assignments we know we want to get performed, let's say, through the course of the year. We are now looking at those mission sets and saying, what do we want to start with, we're identifying those mission sets.

Once we have those mission sets -- it might be construct some tactical infrastructure; it might be run aerial surveillance missions; it might be run ground surveillance missions -- we will go to the National Guard. They will take the mission sets. They will look at their menu of capabilities and they will match the capabilities to the mission sets, and then they will deploy the units.

Now, it is true that, sitting here right now, I do not have in my head every single mission set. The Chief might have it, but for reasons that are self-evident, I'm not going to tell him to announce to the world exactly what they're going to be. But there is a total compilation of missions we need. We know the different types of missions. There are capabilities to match those missions. The National Guard Bureau has a list of the units, and this is simply the mechanical process of matching up the mission sets and the units, and then beginning to deploy them, starting in June.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY McHALE: We're building upon past success, and we are reinforcing that success with a much greater number of personnel and a more robust commitment of resources. The gentleman back there -- I think he said he was from Watertown -- talked about the Northern border. We engaged in precisely this kind of activity last year during Operation Winter Freeze along the Northern border.

We don't know how many helicopters we're going to put up, but we know to a near certainty that we'll have helicopters deployed with aviation-based reconnaissance capabilities so we can watch illegal movement across the border and report that movement to our partners in Customs and Border Protection.

We don't know where we will place sensors to detect illegal movement, but it's almost a certainty that we will have sensors in place to detect such movement. We have capabilities that are related to the remote detection of certain kinds of weapons and we deployed those along the Northern border last year.

We don't know how many barriers or roads we're going to build, but clearly, we will be putting new barriers in place, and clearly, we will be building new roads to ease the movement of Customs and Border Protection along some of the more remote areas.

So your question, sir, is a fair one. We don't have the details of the mission sets. But based on past experience like Operation Winter Freeze and 20 years of experience in the counter-drug program, we've got a pretty clear picture in a general sense of the kinds of missions we'll be executing.

Q What I'm really trying to understand, is this a well-thought-out plan, or is it something that's just been --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY McHALE: Yes, sir, it is.

SECRETARY CHERTOFF: -- in quite exquisite detail, what we know, for example, what we want to build in terms of infrastructure, where we want to run surveillance missions. All -- and this is not something that was necessarily developed just for this, we know it in general. The Chief can speak about this, as well. So -- and all that remains to be done is to prioritize them and match them up to the particular capability.

GENERAL BLUM: This is clearly a well-thought-out plan in that it builds on a time-proven successful model that has demonstrated results for two-and-a-half decades. So all we're taking now is taking that prototype and giving it the resources and the attention that it has never gotten before.

Q The President mentioned in his speech last the need to create a national identity card. Why is that necessary, and is that something that DHS would do?

SECRETARY CHERTOFF: I don't think he said exactly that. What the President did say is, in order to have a temporary worker program, you will need to have to a tamper-proof, biometrically based identity card. And the reason for that is this. You need to give -- a couple reasons. You need to give employers a convenient and easy way to verify the legal status of people that they're going to employ.

We also will need, obviously, to be able to track the comings and goings of people in and out of the border if they're going to become part of this temporary worker program, so that this -- part of the, frankly, enforcement benefit to us of having a temporary worker program is it brings people who would otherwise be operating out of the light, in the shadows, into a situation where we know who they are, we've verified their identity, we've checked their background. And we can now assure the employers that if you have a card, the employer can rely on the card. The whole name of the game here is create an easy and convenient path to legal work, and that makes it easier for us then to enforce against those who don't want to be legal.

Q On interior enforcement, I have a question for either the Secretary or Assistant Secretary Myers. Before Congress kind of sets rules on employer-based enforcement or this guest worker program, what are you going to follow to enforce illegals, undocumented people in the country right now? Are you going to go by old statutes? What are some details --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY MYERS: Sure. Right now we're following the current law. The Secretary set out our interior enforcement strategy as three parts. One part is really enhancing work site enforcement by targeting employers, and so we're using existing law, the existing law on work site enforcement. But we're also bringing in new criminal statutes that we normally hadn't charged employers for.

For example, we find that in many instances that employers that hire illegals as part of their business model really exploit them. And they may engage in money laundering. They may engage in harboring, putting these illegals up in places that are unsafe and filthy. And so what we're doing is we're bringing more aggressive criminal charges against the employers right now. But whatever law is passed, that's the law we'll enforce.

MS. HEALY: Thank you.

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