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THE PROSPECTOR

THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS at EL PASO

Assayer of Student Opinion

July 16, 2008

www.utepprospector.com



Fernie Castillo / The Prospector

The border fence that runs between Sunland Park, N.M. and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, is currently under construction.

BORDER SECURITY ISSUES

Part 1: Two sides of the border fence

Editor's Note: This is part one in a three-part series about border security measures and how they affect the region.

By Isaac Perez

The Prospector

Recently, the border region has become the federal government's focus as a strategic point for homeland security concerns, said Steve McCraw, Texas director of Homeland Security.

Illegal immigration, drug trafficking, gang violence, human smuggling and the compliance of Texas drivers' licenses with the Real ID Act of 2005 were some of the issues the Transportation and Homeland Security committee of the Texas Senate discussed last July 16 at the main branch of the El Paso Public Library Downtown. Seven different panels spoke before the members of the committee, headed by Sen. John Carona (R-Dallas).

The hearing touched on three main areas of concern with large implications for the border region, and in the next few weeks The Prospector will publish a series of articles pertaining to these issues.

This week's article will focus on the construction of a border fence between Mexico and the United States, and in particular, it's impact on this region.

The fence, which is intended to deter illegal border crossings, has been a contested topic in El Paso and elsewhere. The No Border Wall Coalition, a collection of civil organizations such as the Texas

Civil Rights Project and Proyecto Azteca, said in a press release the fence's impact in deterring illegal immigration would be minimal, but it does negatively affect border communities and constitutes an attack on immigrants.

UTEP hosted a campus-community forum about the border fence yesterday at the Union. Josiah Heyman, professor of anthropology, moderated the forum of panelists, which included Veronica Escobar, El Paso County commissioner (district two); Fernando Garcia, director of the Border Network for Human Rights; Robert Curry, director of the Center for Environmental Resources Management at UTEP; and Victor Manjarrez Jr., El Paso sector chief for the U.S. Border Patrol.

The forum, organized by professors from the political science and anthropology departments, was attended by more than 300 people, said Kathleen Staudt, professor of political science and director of the Center for Civic Engagement.

"People are very eager to talk," Staudt said. "I think the kind of questions we saw today imply that people are very against this wall."

The forum addressed several concerns of the El Paso community about the fence, including its impact on the community, its safety and the environment. Manjarrez emphasized the border fence being built by the current administration provides a tactical advantage to his agency.

"People often tend to make this a debate about illegal immigration

when it should be about border security," Manjarrez said. "Without a fence, we would need more than 150,000 patrol agents to secure the border from illegal activities."

On the other hand, Garcia said that the wall is part of a federal policy that focuses solely on enforcement of present laws, disregarding the need for a comprehensive immigration reform that takes into account the human and community elements of security.

Veronica Escobar said she does not believe that a wall is an adequate use of taxpayer dollars, and that El Paso county has joined other border communities in publicly opposing the fence and filing a lawsuit against the federal government. She said a date is still to be determined in the local federal court and the case would be presided over by U.S. District Judge Frank Montalvo.

From the environmental point of view, Curry said the fence would bring mixed results.

"Anything that keeps people out of ecosystems is a benefit; human transit leaves behind trash and roads that disrupt the habitat of species," Curry said. "However, a fence surrounding El Paso would affect the hydrological landscape and the migratory and breeding patterns of wildlife."

Various groups from campus and the community attended the forum. Members of Students for Reform expressed their concern for the construction of a fence.

"The border wall has arrived to our city; I am here because I op-

pose it," said Alan Jimenez, a freshman philosophy major and vice president of Students for Reform. "I oppose borders anywhere in the world."

On July 12, the Catholic Diocese, backed by several organizations including the Border Human Rights Network and the Catholic Campus Ministry at UTEP, staged an El Via Crucis de Jesus Migrante, or The Way of the Cross of the Migrant Jesus, in protest of the construction of the fence and to urge authorities to pass comprehensive immigration reform instead.

"Immigrants in the United States are cast out of their homes by economic forces and are received by a country where the legal system is against them," said Marco Raposo, director of the Peace and Justice Ministry of the El Paso Catholic Diocese. "Their struggle is very similar in its spirituality to the theology of the Via Crucis, which is also a path of suffering." Staudt agrees with Raposo and feels it is one of President Bush's last acts.

"My sense is that the Department of Homeland Security is desperately trying to finish this wall before this administration leaves," said Staudt. "New thinking will come when the new president takes office, and we desperately need comprehensive immigration reform."

The next article in this series will focus on the Real ID Act and border security.

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Education holds summer conference

By Alfonso Gaytán

The Prospector

Hispanics hold only 3.4 percent of the jobs relating to science and engineering in the United States, said Estela Valles, coordinator of Project Action for Equity and the Mother-Daughter Program in the College of Education.

"It is vital to our future as a community that we work to engage and direct our community members and minority populations to the fields of science, technology, engineering, math and higher education, what are known as STEM careers," Valles said.

Project ACE will host the first Summer International Conference of Education that will start at 8 a.m. July 21 and 22 at the Tomás Rivera Conference Center, located on the third floor of Union Building East.

The purpose of the event is to foster interest in the different areas of study available in STEM fields, gender equity awareness in education, bilingual education, best educational practices, service learning and U.S./Mexico border education.

"As a future educator, I would like to learn more about how to make science fun and interesting for the kids," said Christina Betancourt, senior interdisciplinary studies major, who plans to attend the conference.

Conference participants are expected to include UTEP instructors and professors, international scholars from Mexico and South America and students from UTEP and EPCC.

"The purpose of inviting scholars from other colleges is to share resources of what is going on in different areas regarding education," said Noni Silva, conference organizer and coordinator for UTEP's Bilingual Educational Enhancement Mentoring program.

The event will have the participation of children from the El Paso Independent School District, who will present their school science projects to the audience.

"I would present my project as a model for the kids, so they know how important what they are doing is," said Vanesa Garcia, senior educational interdisciplinary studies major.

Her project, "Do Field Research Experiences for Students Increase Interest and Diversity in the Polar Sciences?" is currently being presented at the International Polar Year Conference in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

"We intend to encourage children to continue working in the sciences and to continue with their education all the way to college," Valles said.

UTEP President Diana Natalicio will deliver the opening ad-