

BORDER PATROL STAFFING ON THE NORTHERN BORDER

The National Border Patrol Council has long advocated substantial increases in personnel and equipment for the northern border, and welcomes the current proposals to triple staffing and provide additional funding. However, it is imperative that these staffing increases be accomplished properly. Placing new-hires on the northern border would be detrimental to operations as well as demoralizing to existing personnel who have been waiting years to transfer there.

Placing a large contingent of new-hires on the northern border would greatly reduce operational efficiency for several years, and divert much-needed experienced personnel and other resources to establish a training infrastructure there. Individualized on-the-job training is the only effective method of instructing new-hires in law enforcement agencies. Obviously, this would not be possible if new-hires were used to triple the existing workforce on the northern border. Moreover, it requires a minimum of one year to train new employees to be able to work independently on the southwest border. Since the work on the northern border is considerably more complex, it is fair to assume that it would require substantially more time to achieve the same level of independence.

The short-term savings realized by avoiding the costs of transferring experienced personnel to the northern border would be negligible compared to the considerable expenses of hiring replacements for the disillusioned employees who would leave the agency as a result of not having the opportunity to transfer to these desirable locations. It costs approximately \$60,000 for each transfer compared to approximately \$120,000 to recruit and train each new agent. Even before large numbers of Border Patrol agents were hired as Air Marshals, the attrition rate was unacceptably high. Policies that needlessly encourage valued employees to leave the agency at this critical juncture would be extremely unwise.

In September of 1988, the Border Patrol experimented with the assignment of new-hires away from the southwest border. Fifty new-hires were assigned to the Miami Border Patrol Sector. After six months, only nineteen remained in the Border Patrol. Currently, only four are still stationed in the Miami Border Patrol Sector. This attrition ratio is significantly higher than that for agents who are assigned to the southwest border.

To address these concerns, it is recommended that report language similar to that contained in this year's Senate Appropriations Committee Report be included with any legislation relating to the assignment of Border Patrol agents to the northern border:

Selections for the northern tier shall be by the competitive transfer of experienced agents by means of the existing merit promotion and reassignment system.