

[Green Valley News & Sun](#)

Editorial

Operation Jump Start was designed to help protect the border by deploying National Guard troops until the U.S. Border Patrol hired more agents.

At one time, 6,000 soldiers and airmen were on duty, with 2,400 in Arizona. The Border Patrol says that number has dropped to 3,000 on average today.

Since the program started in 2006, more than 17,000 voluntarily have worked in support roles, allowing Border Patrol agents to focus on enforcement. No National Guard forces have been used in enforcement capacities.

President Bush's idea was a success, in nearly everyone's estimation. It helped increase the number of detentions and drug interdictions. But the program ends July 15 before the Border Patrol is fully staffed.

We support efforts by the Arizona congressional delegation to extend Operation Jump Start. An proposal by U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., would keep the Guard on the border indefinitely. We do not support an indefinite stay, but we would like to see the program extended through the end of the year.

When Bush launched Operation Jump Start, he announced his support to hire 6,000 more Border Patrol agents. The Border Patrol, which has been recruiting feverishly, needs to find another 2,000 men and women before reaching its goal of employing an 18,000-member force by Dec. 31.

The Bush administration faces a daunting problem. It needs the Guard to fight wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But it also needs security on the border, which is plagued by drug violence and a yearly cycle of death with migrants setting off through the hot Arizona desert.

Mitchell and U.S. Reps. Gabrielle Giffords, Jeff Flake, Trent Franks, Rick Renzi and John Shadegg wrote a letter to Bush, saying they "fear the combined effect of a delay in virtual fencing and a further drawdown of National Guard along the border will make matters even worse."

"We believe we need more resources at the border, not less, and respectfully request that you maintain Operation Jump Start along our southern border," they said in their letter.

In April, Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano, New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger asked congressional leaders to extend and fully fund the operation. Napolitano previously wrote to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, asking him to continue the operation.

Noticeably absent from the letter was U.S. Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz. He said the putting the Guard on the border looks good politically but does not solve drug- and human-trafficking problems. He said organized crime is the real problem on the border.

We agree with Grijalva's concern about organized crime. But we disagree with his assessment on what the Guard can do to assist the Border Patrol.

By finding illegal drugs and border-crossers near the Arizona-Mexico line, the Border Patrol keeps the crime and disruptions out of the Green Valley area. Operation Jump Start has worked, and it's reasonable and prudent, in our estimation, to extend it through Dec. 31.