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BUSINESS VIEWPOINT

Border battle crosses the line

Hundreds of immigrants have begun crossing the border from Canada into Idaho. They are hunkering down in the valley north of Moyes Springs, cultivating their "secret" plans to move into the state and find ways to cultivate drug and human smuggling activities.

Local police and Division of Wildlife agents in Bonner County have posted signs, warning Idaho residents to stay clear of the national parks around the region because of terrorist activity conducted by these groups against would-be visitors, or anyone "who gets in our way!"

Officials have posted signs that read "Cross this line at your own demise." A brochure reads, "If you see something suspicious, run away! Do not confront! Tell authorities."

This invasion is neither condoned nor sponsored by the Canadian Government. They do not provide guns, weapons or transportation to this group. They do not wish to confront this violent group of drug smugglers. And, on the other hand, do nothing on their side of the border to stop the conquest.

The smugglers are secretly maneuvering to get into the United States. They want to take advantage of the economic, living conditions, jobs and government systems provided by the U.S.

Sound farfetched?

Idaho may share a different border, a different neighbor than Arizona, but I was appalled when I read the following report:

"About 3,500 acres of southern Arizona along the Mexican border is closed to U.S. citizens due to increased



MARKETPLACE

ROBB HICKEN

violence in the region.

"The closed off area stretches 80 miles along the border and includes part of the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. It was closed in October 2006 'due to human safety concerns,' the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said Wednesday in response to news reports on the closure."

Have we really returned to the days of the Old West when I'm safer if I carry a gun – shoot first and then ask questions?

What part of national security is this?

Have we now reached an impasse with the Mexican government that rather than protect the border established by treaty, we allow the "gangs" to have their territory?

From the business standpoint, trade with Mexico is crucial. The United States accounts for nearly 75 percent of total Mexican trade, and Mexico has become the United States' second largest trading partner since the North American Free Trade Agreement began.

According to the state Department of Commerce, in the first three quarters of 2009, Idaho exported \$131 million in

goods and services to Mexico. Mexico was Idaho's sixth largest export destination for that year. Idaho's trade with Mexico increased by 1.72 percent from 2008, and increased totals of \$186.9 million in 2009. Idaho's exports to Mexico of dairy products increased by more than 72 percent from 2008. Food and Agricultural products accounted for 67.1 percent of total Idaho exports to Mexico.

As far back as 1996, Idaho and Jalisco, Mexico, established a sister-state relationship, maintaining a trade office in Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco.

Idaho is host to consulate Ricardo Pineda, a former deputy consul general for the Mexican consulate in San Diego. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated in 2008 that there are 147,426 Hispanics among Idaho's 1.5 million residents.

The state Department of Labor stated the buying power of all 1.5 million Idahoans rose fractionally from 2008 to 2009, but Hispanic buying power grew 10 times faster than the buying power of the state's non-Hispanic majority.

According to estimates from the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia, the buying power of Idaho's Hispanic population increased 3.1 percent in 2009 to \$2.5 billion – less than half the 7.7 percent increase that pushed its 2008 buying power over \$2.4 billion but still exceeding a national growth of 2.8 percent. Last year was the sixth straight year Idaho Hispanics have fared better than Hispanics nationwide.

We would be enraged if we were invaded by a gang of hooligan drug lords crossing the Idaho border. Where do we stand now?