

Published in the San Diego Union Tribune on March 7, 2010

By now, many people in San Diego County are familiar with news reports that detail the efforts of University of California San Diego professors to develop a GPS cell phone application intended to help facilitate illegal entry across the U.S.-Mexico border.

Given the immense problems we already face with drug smuggling, violence and illegal immigration, this is an irresponsible use of technology that would only compound existing security challenges.

There are serious questions about the legality of this application, as well as legitimate concerns surrounding the fact that research and development is spearheaded by professors whose salaries are paid by the state of California. Similar questions arise about the source of a university grant that is funding a project intended to help anyone in the world cross the southern land border. Surely, an overwhelming majority of state taxpayers would oppose their dollars being used to develop an application for this purpose, especially when it comes at an even greater cost over time.

We all know that California's fiscal nightmare is due in large part to the escalating costs attributable to illegal immigration, right now estimated at \$10 billion a year. This taxpayer support covers the expense of social service programs, education, health care, criminal incarceration and apparently now the cost of technology upgrades that promote illegal cross-border activity. Taxpayers should be outraged.

Proponents say the application will help save lives by protecting illegal immigrants from the dangers of expansive terrain and inclement weather, conditions that are largely responsible for hundreds of border deaths a year. This loss of life is the tragic result of illegal immigrants going to extreme lengths to cross the border. Still, the solution to this problem does not reside with encouraging more illegal crossing attempts, but rather deterring illegal entry through a combination of available enforcement measures.

Oftentimes, these same illegal immigration activists identify increased border security efforts,

particularly the implementation of reinforced infrastructure, as inhumane and inconsistent with our nation's long-standing immigration policy. What they fail to recognize is that, besides an increase in apprehension rates, border security improvements in recent years, starting with the construction of new infrastructure under the Secure Fence Act, has contributed to a significant decline in cross-border deaths.

Nonetheless, the cell phone application under development would ultimately offer individuals, many of whom might never before have considered crossing the border, the guidance needed to circumvent our nation's security procedures and immigration laws. For those who originate from countries other than Mexico, including countries of national security concern such as China or Yemen, an application of this type would provide the primary source of information needed to successfully navigate the land border.

This application must also be differentiated from water stations and emergency communication towers already in position for emergency relief – not to proactively assist illegal crossings. There is a clear distinction between these resources and this navigational tool.

The most appropriate step for UCSD is to immediately denounce this research and ensure it does not move forward, at least with the university as a platform. At a time when California faces unprecedented budget constraints and our nation faces evolving security challenges, this would be the right thing to do. Our focus must center on protecting American interests, something on which we should all agree and work to advance.