

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Sen. Dave Schultheis
(719) 648-1777

COLORADO
STATE SENATE
STATE CAPITOL
DENVER
80203

Schultheis calls for swift action to rout illegals from forests following massive drug bust

Colorado Springs Sen. Dave Schultheis said today that the recent arrest of illegal immigrants plying the drug trade in Colorado's national forests should sound the alarm for state officials about the growing role illegal immigration plays in expanding international drug cartels into the United States.

The veteran El Paso County Republican lawmaker, a longtime critic of lax state and federal immigration policies, called on Gov. Bill Ritter and the General Assembly to take aggressive action, including beefing up the Colorado State Patrol's immigration enforcement unit. Schultheis said the state should consider requesting federal stimulus funding to step up state law enforcement against illegal immigration.

"The safety of our citizens ought to be the governor's paramount concern and should take precedence in budget matters—even in a down economy," Schultheis said. "It's time to reprioritize."

The Denver Post reported this week that a sweep by federal agents, in the Pike National Forest near Deckers, uncovered at least one weapon, piles of discarded garbage, propane tanks and more than 14,500 marijuana plants in an area the size of a football field. The drug cache reportedly could be the largest marijuana-growing operation ever found in Colorado.

As noted in the Post report, Mexico-based drug cartels are increasingly growing marijuana in U.S. national forests to avoid the risks of smuggling Mexican-grown pot across the border. U.S. authorities say the cartels recruit workers from Mexico to spend months living in Colorado forests monitoring the plants. According to the Post report,

federal authorities say the drug operations pose a hazard to hikers who may happen upon the armed farmers in the woods and also threaten streams that can be polluted by chemicals used to grow marijuana.

“This is a real wake-up call, and state officials bear some of the responsibility here,” Schultheis said. “The illegal aliens involved in these drug operations came to Colorado on state highways. Stronger vigilance and enforcement might have prevented this from happening.”

Schultheis said Colorado “has a history of going easy on illegals.” He noted the governor himself, as Denver’s district attorney, had allowed illegal aliens to plea-bargain down to “agricultural trespass” charges, He said Colorado has become known as being a sanctuary state.

“The governor should remember that Colorado also has borders, and it is his responsibility to defend Colorado's borders so that such illegal activity doesn't enter our state and end up costing taxpayers,” Schultheis said. He also demanded a statement from Ritter as to exactly what he is planning to do to stop such illegal drug rings in the state.

Schultheis urged the governor’s support of a bill to require Colorado employers to utilize the federal E-verify program, ensuring their workers are lawfully in the country. Schultheis said he will introduce that bill again next year following two previous attempts blocked by ruling legislative Democrats.

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