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Military Veterans: Border Patrol Activities Unhindered by New Monument Refute Rep. Bishop's Claim that Monument Poses Security Threat

Las Cruces, New Mexico – Veterans are strongly refuting unfounded claims by Representative Rob Bishop (R-UT) that the designation of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument will increase illegal border crossings or hinder Customs and Border Patrol efforts in this area. These criticisms are intended to incite fear and are not supported by the facts.

Prior to the broadly supported national monument designation, Senators Udall and Heinrich and the Department of Interior worked with the Department of Homeland Security, including U.S. Border Patrol, to ensure that the ability to conduct law enforcement activities in the National Monument would be unimpeded.

The reality is that the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks national monument designation retains U.S. Border Patrol's current access to public lands within and around the monument boundary. Law enforcement activities will continue and be unaffected.

"The current wild character of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks has led to extremely low rates of illegal border crossing activity. Simply put, this is not a problem area for illegal border crossings," said **Garett Reppenhagen**, regional coordinator for Vet Voice Foundation and a U.S. Army veteran who served as a cavalry scout sniper in Kosovo and Iraq. *"Representative Bishop's conflating of Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks with areas where illegal border crossing has been a problem, such as parts of Arizona, is misleading and shows he hasn't done his homework about the area in question. Rather than couching his ideological opposition to land protection within false claims about border security, Rep. Bishop should spend some time familiarizing himself with the facts."*

According to the [Albuquerque Journal](#), the Santa Teresa station of Border Patrol's El Paso Sector apprehended only 13 illegal immigrants south of the Potrillo Mountains in Fiscal Year 2009, an area it patrols. This was 0.1 percent of the 14,999 total apprehensions in the El Paso Sector, which covers the entire state of New Mexico and the two western most counties in Texas, and only 0.002 percent of the apprehensions along the entire U.S. Southwest Border.

Additionally, apprehensions in the El Paso Sector have [declined by 26 percent from 2009 to 2013](#).

“If the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks were an attractive area for illegal border crossing or smuggling, those activities would already be going on. But with current Border Patrol measures in place, this area is nearly impenetrable,” said Las Cruces resident **Peter Ossorio**, a retired Army Field Artillery and Tactical Intelligence Officer and retired Assistant U.S. Attorney who prosecuted drug smugglers in southern New Mexico for eight years. *“Instead of being scared off by baseless claims about border security, I am delighted that President Obama has protected these public lands, which will benefit our quality of life, our economy, and future generations.”*

“President Obama deserves congratulations for responding to local communities and protecting the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument,” said **Retired U.S. Army Brigadier General Steven M. Anderson**. *“This designation will stimulate the local economy, preserve our history, and protect a beautiful part of our nation -- while allowing Border Patrol to continue doing their job keeping these public lands among the most secure along the Southwest border.”*

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