

Letters

False claims again being made about wilderness

Here they go again. The same well-endowed advocates of drilling, digging, cutting and corporate ranching who opposed the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument are back. They want to use fear to prevent protecting part of the monument as wilderness.

Instead of owning up to their real agenda of privatizing our public lands for their profits, they claim that drug traffickers and terrorists will stream through the desert if Congress formally designates as wilderness remote areas – many of which have been managed for decades as if they were wilderness.

The truth is that Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich's staffs closely coordinated with both the Border Patrol and sheriff's department to "carve out" key locations and "cherry stem" road access to minimize conflict with federal and local law enforcement and emergency response. You can decide for yourself at Udall's website.

The old, repeated reference

to Arizona's problems again ignores that those areas are smack up against the border. Here, there is not only the pre-existing "buffer" – including the rapid response, paved Highway 9 – between the border and the proposed wilderness, but the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act would increase law enforcement's operational area. To quote from the official summary: "[T]he designation of wilderness does not affect Border Patrol's ability to conduct border security activity in wilderness areas."

Management of our public lands to comply with the law is a difficult task, deserving of continued local input. Conflating land management issues and exaggerated claims about national security is not helpful.

If, as Joyce Kilmer wrote, "... only God can make a tree," only Congress – not the president – can make a wilderness. The OMDP National Monument was the right decision; now Congress should pass SB 3049 and permanently protect part of the monument as wilderness.

*Peter M. Ossorio,
Las Cruces*