



Giffords backs interim I-19 checkpoint **Station nine miles from Green Valley will work for now**

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U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords has persuaded federal officials to move and scale back an interim border checkpoint on Interstate 19 about nine miles south of Green Valley.

Southern Arizona residents have been peeved about a permanent checkpoint, afraid smugglers will disperse around it and into their neighborhoods.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection has wanted a bigger checkpoint closer to Green Valley.

"I want it out of a place that is going to be a densely populated area in 10 or 20 years," Giffords said. "I would like to see the checkpoint have a much smaller footprint."

She hasn't decided about a larger and permanent checkpoint opposed by Green Valley and Tubac residents. Giffords will wait for the results of a Government Accountability Office study Giffords has requested along with U.S. Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., and U.S. Rep. Raúl Grijalva, D-Ariz. The study will determine how well permanent checkpoints work.

The checkpoint for years moved up and down I-19, but since it stopped moving, an increase in apprehensions has followed, Giffords said.

Between October 2006 and July 2007, 7,000 illegal immigrants have been apprehended and 60,000 pounds of drugs seized at the checkpoint, Giffords said. During the same time the previous year, 3,600 illegal immigrants were taken into custody and 17,000 pounds of drugs were grabbed, she said.

Robert Gilbert, chief of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Tucson Sector, still wants to build a permanent checkpoint, but he has agreed, in general terms, to scale back the size.

Gilbert wrote in a letter to Giffords on Thursday:

"I would like to reassure you that although our office has not identified a location for a permanent checkpoint facility, that we will seek to minimize the size of the footprint to the extent possible."

The plan had been to build a checkpoint large enough to be staffed by 150 agents and cover eight lanes of traffic.

U.S. Rep. Jim Kolbe, a Republican who retired last year, had been able to prevent a permanent checkpoint because he sat on the powerful House Appropriations Committee. That prohibition was lifted in November.

Right now there are 34 permanent checkpoints in every Customs and Border Protection sector along the Mexican border, except the Tucson Sector.