

Politico

Dramatic drop for illegal immigration

By Scott Wong

September 1, 2010

The Obama administration is touting an independent report released Wednesday that shows that the number of illegal immigrants crossing into the U.S. fell by nearly 65 percent in recent years.

About 300,000 immigrants illegally entered the country each year from March 2007 to March 2009, nearly two-thirds fewer than the 850,000 who annually crossed the border from 2000 to 2005, according to the report by the nonpartisan Pew Hispanic Center.

An estimated 11.1 million illegal immigrants were living in the U.S. in 2009, an 8 percent decline from the peak of 12 million in 2007. That represented the first significant decrease in two decades, the report said.

“We’ve seen a reversal in what had been a long-term growth in the unauthorized immigrant population,” Pew demographer Jeffrey Passel, who co-authored the report, told reporters.

The decline corresponded with a period when authorities beefed up border security and jobs dried up amid the economic recession, though researchers could not pinpoint precisely why immigrant numbers fell.

A Homeland Security Department spokesman said the administration’s increased efforts to secure the border contributed to the declines in border crossings, even though President Barack Obama was in office for only two months out of the two years that the Pew study reviewed.

“This administration’s unprecedented commitment of manpower, technology and infrastructure to the Southwest border has been a major factor in this dramatic drop in illegal crossings,” DHS spokesman Matt Chandler said in a statement.

He later pointed out that the downward trend in border crossings has continued since Obama took office in January 2009, citing Homeland Security statistics that show decreases in illegal-immigrant apprehensions during the past two years.

The new Pew figures, based on Census Bureau data, come as a national debate rages over efforts by state and local governments to clamp down on illegal immigration. The issue has figured prominently in the midterm election season as candidates from around the country have touted their border security credentials.

Republicans have hammered Democrats, saying they are soft on illegal immigration and have not done enough to shore up the Southwest border.

But Chandler said the Department of Homeland Security has cracked down on employers who hire illegal immigrants, deported a large number of criminal aliens and sent hundreds of millions of dollars in additional resources to the border.

“The Border Patrol is better staffed than at any time in its 85-year history, and the Southwest border is more secure than ever before,” Chandler added.

Just this week, the first wave of 1,200 National Guard troops deployed by Obama began arriving on the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said Monday that a Predator drone would begin patrolling the skies above the Southwest border this week, part of \$600 million in border security funding authorized by Congress last month.