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## [Napolitano Offers Obama Pragmatic Take on Immigration](#)

**Arizona Governor Likely for Homeland Security Chief**



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By [John Dougherty](#) 11/25/08 6:07 AM



Gov. Janet Napolitano (Arizona Governor's Office)

PHOENIX—If Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano becomes the new secretary of homeland security, this centrist Democrat could have the opportunity to institute nationwide reforms to address continuing problems with illegal immigration and border security. These reforms could grow out of the policies and programs that Napolitano has tested in her 15 years of public service in a state that is ground zero in America's struggle to control its borders.

Napolitano, 50, is now frequently mentioned as President-elect Barack Obama's leading candidate to run the Dept. of Homeland Security, a sprawling bureaucracy with 200,000 employees and a \$50 billion budget that is responsible for protecting against future terrorist attacks, securing borders from illegal entry and responding to natural disasters through oversight of the much-maligned Federal Emergency Management Agency. The department also includes the Secret Service, the U.S. Coast Guard and other agencies.

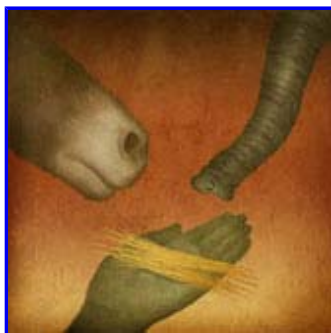


Illustration by: Matt Mahurin

As governor, Napolitano developed expertise in many of homeland security's primary missions. She gained a national profile when she demanded in 2006 that the federal government pay for deploying National Guard troops along the border to help the overwhelmed U.S. Border Patrol, a move that foreshadowed President George W. Bush's deployment of guard troops to the Mexican border. Those troops have since been withdrawn, and last week Napolitano called for their redeployment.

A former U.S. attorney and state attorney general, Napolitano has been widely popular in a conservative, Republican-leaning state since winning the governorship in 2002. She carried every legislative district in her 2006 re-election.

Critics say Napolitano gained notoriety more through shrewd political decisions, like her call for the National Guard deployment, than by taking tough stands on important issues, including human-rights matters, that could be major considerations for a homeland security secretary.

Critics also point to her actions while U.S. attorney for Arizona in the mid-1990s. Napolitano soft-pedaled a Justice Dept. investigation into the notorious Maricopa County jails operated by Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who remains a powerful political force in Arizona. Arpaio, a Republican, later supported Napolitano in her first gubernatorial campaign — a race she won narrowly.

If appointed and confirmed as DHS secretary, Napolitano is expected to take a pragmatic approach in dealing with the nation's porous borders and its estimated 12 million illegal immigrants. She's against the concept of "sealing the border" with a wall, instead favoring high-tech solutions across the Southwest.

Napolitano has said she has no time for "unrealistic" demands to round up and deport every undocumented worker. At the same time, she's not about to extend a blanket amnesty, like that approved by President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. She has talked instead about a strict protocol for allowing immigrants to remain in the United States, including stiff fines and requiring a history of paying taxes.

Napolitano is also poised to reform the nation's visa system to increase the needed supply of workers — whether skilled, high-tech experts or seasonal migrant farm workers. But that won't be a back-door entry, Napolitano insists, because she supports tough employer sanctions for companies that knowingly hire undocumented workers.

Napolitano has steered this meandering course during her six years as governor in a state where voters have passed a series of initiatives that have made life far more difficult for illegal immigrants, including denying welfare benefits. She vetoed more than a dozen bills that she deemed too harsh or too expensive to implement. But, at the same time, she has demanded that the federal government take immediate steps to control the border and has insisted that the state be reimbursed for the costs of imprisoning illegal immigrants.

Arizona has had to deal with the expenses of severe overcrowding in its prison system because it incarcerates illegal immigrants that are the federal government's responsibility. Napolitano has sent the Justice Dept. a bill for \$500 million to cover unreimbursed costs over the last six years, including a \$500,000 penalty for each year delinquent and \$11 million in interest, calculated at 1.8 percent.

She has also been pro-active in developing bi-national agreements with Mexico to strengthen border security.

Napolitano has managed large-scale emergency response operations that should give her a head start on strengthening FEMA. She has been tested, literally under fire, in developing a statewide emergency response plan for natural disasters that has proven effective in reducing the dangers of catastrophic wildfires that threaten much of Arizona's 2.5 million acres of Ponderosa pine forest. Her experience could offer insights when trying to strengthen the nation's emergency response system in era of global warming and powerful hurricanes.

The Arizona governor also has a leg up on anti-terrorism strategies. In 2004, Napolitano opened the Arizona Counter Terrorism Information Center, considered one of the best regional intelligence-gathering operations. The center is staffed with more than 200 detectives, special agents, analysts and other personnel representing 34 state, local and federal agencies.

But it is Napolitano's handling of illegal immigration that has attracted national attention. Illegal immigrants have overwhelmed many of Arizona's public schools, hospitals and prisons, especially since stronger border enforcement in California and Texas has funneled millions of immigrants toward Arizona. They hike across the Sonoran Desert, a dangerous trek that kills hundreds each year. Arizona, with a population of 6.2 million, has an estimated 650,000 illegal immigrants.

Doris Meissner, former director of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in the Clinton administration who is now at the Migration Policy Institute, a Washington nonpartisan think tank, said Napolitano "has been outspoken about the need for effective federal action" to control the border while "stressing the importance of comprehensive immigration reform legislation."

Meissner said Napolitano “would be an excellent choice” to lead homeland security’s 22 different agencies. “She has impeccable law-enforcement and leadership credentials,” Meissner said, “and as a border-state governor has direct knowledge and experience of how our broken immigration system is affecting her state and the nation.”

Roy Beck, president of Numbers USA, a policy group that seeks to reduce immigration, criticized Napolitano, saying she supports “amnesty” for illegal immigrants, though he still praised her efforts in taking steps to “secure the border.” In what may be a signal that Napolitano could face tough questioning from Republicans, many Numbers USA members harshly criticized Beck’s recent statement in his blog, that “Obama could do a lot worse” in picking Napolitano.

Randall Larsen, director of the nonpartisan Institute for Homeland Security, which advocates containing terrorism, said Napolitano’s “resume is very impressive for what you are looking for in a secretary of homeland security.” However, Larsen said he was concerned that Napolitano lacked Washington experience, so who she selects as her deputy could be “very important.”

Rodolfo Espino, a professor of political science at Arizona State University, said Napolitano could face a relatively easy confirmation process, in part because Republicans in Arizona are eager to see her leave, for it would open the way for the Republican secretary of state, Jan Brewer, to succeed her as governor.

Espino said Napolitano has steered a centrist course on immigration policy, angering both the extreme left and far right. He predicted that Napolitano could push states to cooperate more on border security. “She’s going to take a very pragmatic approach that immigration forces are tied to economic trends,” Espino said.

Napolitano, who has declined to comment on her possible appointment, outlined her comprehensive plan on immigration policy in a February 2007 speech to the National Press Club in Washington. The speech provides a window into the policies that Napolitano clearly wanted Congress to implement only a month after she and Obama held a lengthy meeting to discuss a wide range of issues.

“We have to acknowledge that illegal immigration is a supply-and-demand problem, and that Congress must address both sides of that equation,” Napolitano said. The governor said Washington must take a two-pronged approach to addressing illegal immigration by not only cutting off the undocumented workers from across the border, or the supply of labor, but also increasing penalties on employers who hired illegal workers.

She dismissed anti-immigration leaders’ demands to seal the border with a wall as a “simplistic” solution, doomed to fail. She repeated her often-used phrase of “show me a 50-foot wall, and I’ll show you a 51-foot ladder.” Napolitano also said that rounding up an estimated 12 million “undocumented workers” for deportation is a “joke” and “not reality-based.”

Instead of a building an expensive 700-mile-long wall across vast stretches that could be difficult to maintain, Napolitano said there should be additional federal spending on developing “technology-driven” border controls, including ground-based sensors, radar and unmanned aerial vehicles backed by more Border Patrol agents.

The governor also said in her 2007 speech that she wants to reform the nation’s visa policies to “widen the legal labor pool” and revise quotas, so that nations are awarded visas on a more equitable basis. She noted that the Dominican Republic, with a population of 8 million, is granted more visas on a per capita basis than Mexico, with a population of 100 million. “No wonder it takes, on average, more than 10 years to get a legal immigrant visa from Mexico,” she said, “talk about incentive to cross illegally.”

Napolitano signaled that she would support a nationwide requirement that all employers must verify the legal status of employees through a federal database called E-Verify. “Employers who hire illegal immigrants — and know it — should be held accountable and penalized,” she said.

In 2007, Napolitano signed the nation’s toughest employer sanction’s law for hiring illegal immigrants after Arizona voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum. The law required employers to use E-Verify on new hires after Jan. 1, 2008. There have been few complaints from businesses since the law was implemented last July. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many illegal immigrants are leaving Arizona.

As far as the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants living in the country, Napolitano said the “only realistic alternative” is to “create a strict, stringent pathway to citizenship.” That pathway, the governor said, “must involve a substantial fine, learning English, having no criminal history, keeping a job, paying taxes, then getting in the back of the line and waiting your turn.”

Napolitano has been an advocate of strengthening the state’s ability to respond to emergency situations and be on the frontline of detecting and stopping terrorists. Her philosophy merges with a report last week in The Wall Street Journal that Obama’s advisers have said that the Dept. of Homeland Security may be in for a major overhaul, with a particular focus on redefining the relationship between the department and state and local officials.

Napolitano has earned a reputation of being a quick study, with an ability to bring divergent interests together for a common solution — skills that will be imperative in running homeland security. Soon after taking office, Napolitano established a statewide task force to develop plans to restore forest health and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires in the aftermath of a June 2002 fire that burned 467,000 acres of woodland.

Napolitano championed various solutions, included thinning thousands of acres of overgrown and drought-weakened pine forests near populated areas. These preventive steps helped contain to less than 100 acres what might have been a serious wildfire that erupted near Flagstaff in 2006.

“She created a space for people to sit down and respectively build an agreement and then develop strategies that could be successfully implemented,” said Todd Schulke, senior policy adviser with Center for Biological Diversity, a Tucson-based environmental group. “We will miss her.”

