

CHERTOFF'S FENCE

All this talk about Michael Chertoff's role in refusing CIA an advance declination for torture had gotten me wondering about the status of Chertoff's biggest policy initiative at the Department of Homeland Security: the fence along the Mexican border. Last I remembered, the Bush Administration was using the fence as an excuse to shred environmental and property laws—except in the case of key Bush supporters.

As it happens, C&L links to a story and a GAO study updating us on Chertoff's fence. And it's going about as badly as I expected.

The Department of Homeland Security's plan to build a virtual fence across the U.S.-Mexico border has come to a crashing halt just days before the release of a report expected to slam the system.

Homeland chief Janet Napolitano beat the Government Accountability Office report to the punch when she announced Tuesday that she's freezing funding for the Secure Border Initiative Network.

Homeland Security hired The Boeing Co. 3 1/2 years ago to build a string of towers along the 2,000-mile border. The towers were to integrate off-the-shelf products – cameras, radar, connections to ground sensors – so that Border Patrol agents could see who and what was coming across in real time.

Boeing made big promises about SBInet's capabilities.

"Ninety to 100 percent of all illegal crossers, this camera system was going to identify and characterize this threat," said Rich Stana, who wrote a report on the project last year for the GAO.

Boeing built a 28-mile test section in the Southern Arizona desert. It didn't work. The company regrouped, redesigned and redeployed one set of towers near the first set. It is building another section right now. The entire border was supposed to be covered a year ago, but after three years – and \$1.4 billion – the system is still full of bugs.

"Well, it sort of works," Stana said.

\$1.4 billion to roll back on environmental protections with a buggy computer mess—and little improved security—as a result?!?!? No one could have anticipated!

Meanwhile, the numbers of undocumented workers are beginning to drop since Bush made such a hash of our economy there's no real reason to come here in the first place.