

President Trump: The Lone Border Wall Ranger

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Almost two years into his Presidency, Donald Trump is still determined to build a wall along the 2,000 mile U.S.-Mexico border. Yet as he trudges along with demands for funding, he is still having trouble convincing his own party to support the endeavor. Many Congressional Republicans have raised concerns over the wall's efficiency, as well as, the funding needed for its construction. Until recently, most offices on the Hill seemed to be operating under an “ignore and hope it goes away” strategy. Not a single congressional representative in the nine districts along the border—including the lone Republican House Member—is in favor of a wall. Here's what members of President Trump's own party have to say about the wall.

1. A 2,000 Mile Long Border Wall Won't Work

Building a wall spanning the entire length of the border won't solve our country's immigration issues, and Congressional Republicans know it. Especially because we've already erected about 700 miles of barriers along the Southern Border, covering the areas that are the heaviest

trafficked.¹ Even Republicans who want border security increases agree that a wall isn't the answer. Several have suggested the need for funding of technological and personnel resources to strengthen border security, rather than a physical border wall.

- Republican Congressman Will Hurd (TX 23rd), whose district runs eight hundred miles along the Rio Grande—making up one-third of the Southern border—has not only described building a wall in his district as “impossible,” he’s repeatedly stated it won’t work. He argues that building a wall is an archaic approach to border security. “People that are dealing with this issue know that a 3rd century solution to a 21st century problem is not going to fix this long-term.”²
- While he has warmed to the idea by including funding for physical barriers in a proposed Senate border security bill, Republican Senator John Cornyn (TX) has also made some pretty damning arguments against the efficacy of a border wall. In February 2017 he admitted, “There's parts of our border which it makes absolutely no sense.”³ And the Senator has continued to express skepticism on a wall doing anything to improve security, stating “People can climb over the wall or go under the wall or through the wall. We’ve seen that in different places... If it’s just unattended without sensors, without technology, without people, then it won’t work.”⁴
- Even the GOP lawmakers who are working to fund Trump’s border wall doubt the feasibility of such a project. In a post on his website, Republican Senator Thom Tillis (NC) said “we need to recognize that a continuous wall from one end of our Southern border to the other is neither feasible nor effective. It’s basic geology. A 20 foot wall on a 3,000 foot sheer cliff will not stop human crossings or drug trafficking, and neither will a 20 foot wall on the Rio Grande River, where the winding river and soft soil make construction extremely difficult and expensive.”⁵

2. A Border Wall is a Massive Waste of Money

Trump's border wall would also be ludicrously expensive. Walling in the remaining unfenced areas of the border would be significantly more expensive than the cost of building the existing barriers. The unfenced areas tend to be in remote regions where fewer crossings happen, and where the costs of transporting materials and construction crews will be dramatically higher. Additionally, much of the unfenced border is located along the Rio Grande River in Texas, meaning that there is already a natural barrier. Moreover, the vast majority of the land is privately owned, and the federal government would have to seize much of the land from citizens using eminent domain—and pay for it (for more on the inefficient aspects of the wall, read our memo *The State of the Southern Border*).⁶

In total, estimates are as high as \$67 billion to build the border wall.⁷ And Congress hasn't even come close to allocating that vast sum of federal money. The House's proposed 2019 spending bill for the Department of Homeland Security includes \$5 billion in funding for barriers on the border, while the Senate bill is proposing \$1.6 billion for border security.⁸ Trump keeps thumping his fist for more money, even threatening a partial government shutdown, but he appears to be the only one for whom border wall funding is a priority. Republican Members of Congress, especially those from border regions, are painfully aware of just how much American taxpayers would have to pay for something that won't solve a single one of our immigration problems.

- Crucial swing votes in the Senate are especially skeptical of allocating billions of dollars for the wall. Take Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski (AK), Chairwoman of the Interior-Environment Appropriations Subcommittee. Murkowski has expressed her discomfort with supporting the allocation of billions of dollars to fund a border wall, without justification for such a large amount of money or an understanding of where the funds will come from. “If you're going to spend that kind of money, you're going to have to show me where you're going to get that money.”⁹
- When threatened by the President with a partial shutdown unless he got \$5 billion in wall funding, Republicans expressed scant enthusiasm for going to the mat for the wall. As Republican Senator Shelley Moore Capito (WV) said, “I don’t think there’s the stomach for a shutdown...I think we’re going to avoid it at all costs.”¹⁰
- In addition to thinking that a wall is an antiquated means of border security, Congressman Hurd has publicly questioned the cost of constructing such an ineffective barrier. “I’ve made it clear time and time again that building a physical wall from sea to shining sea is the most expensive and least effective way to secure the border.”¹¹
- And no one in Congress believes for a second that Mexico will pay for the wall, nor are members thrilled about throwing billions of taxpayer dollars at the border wall. As Republican Senator Rand Paul (KY) put it, “I’m for some sort of security and barrier. But I don’t think once you’re for that that you should throw out your notions of conservative spending with taxpayer dollars... I’m not for \$40 billion for a wall. I just don’t think we have it.”¹²

Conclusion

Many policymakers in President Trump’s own party are either hesitant about or outright opposed to building a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. This should surprise no one. Those even

remotely familiar with immigration and border security know that a wall won't solve the immigration challenges the nation faces. Instead of wasting billions of taxpayer dollars on a boondoggle, Congress should address the real problems in our broken immigration system.

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ENDNOTES

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