

Why Walls Won't Work

Evidence shows that walls along the U.S.-Mexico border do not improve border security or address immigration problems. However, they are very effective at wasting taxpayer dollars.

By all indications, border walls are not significantly decreasing undocumented immigration and smuggling, and do not significantly improve border security. Therefore, walls are a poor investment. Despite these facts, the **2013 Senate immigration bill S.744 proposes \$1.5 billion** to construct additional border walls.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano has made it clear in her testimony on this proposed legislation that more walls should not be mandated, stating: ***“We would prefer having money not so designated so that we can look at technology, air-based, ground-based, manpower, other needs that may be more fitting to prevent illegal flows across the Southwest border ”***



Walls are easily and inexpensively defeated. This photo of a pile of ladders on the south side of the border wall in south Texas proves how easily the wall can be surmounted in a matter of seconds. Photo: Scott Nicol

“You show me a 50-foot wall and I’ll show you a 51-foot ladder at the border. That’s the way the border works”¹ – DHS Secretary and former Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano



A \$1 rope defeats a steel wall that costs at least \$6.5 Million per mile to build. Photo: Matt Clark

Border lawmakers have also voiced their preference for more effective methods and flexibility at the border. Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) said at an April 2013 hearing: ***“I don’t believe that building a fence across a 2,000-mile Southern border is the answer... It’s really a combination of tactics, technology and boots on the ground. I would like to see a little more flexibility in the department in coming up with the best strategy in achieving that goal.”***

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) concluded: ***“The primary fence, by itself, did not have a discernible impact on the influx of unauthorized aliens coming across the border in San Diego.”***² If anything, wall segments merely shift unauthorized traffic and enforcement activity into other areas that are more rugged and difficult to patrol. Reductions in apprehensions often occur in sectors **that do not have walls.**³ Texas’ Rio Grande Valley Sector saw a 45.3 percent decrease in apprehensions from 2005-2007—a 15-year low. Conversely, “overall apprehensions in San Diego, where fences have been in place since 1993, defied the downward trend, jumping by 20 percent in 2007.”³

¹ Source: Associated Press in the Tucson Citizen: *More Fence Doesn't Make Sense, Napolitano Says*, http://www.tucsoncitizen.com/news/local/122205a11_Napolitano-Border

² Source: Congressional Research Report: Border Security: Barriers Along the U.S. International Border, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/homsec/RL33659.pdf>

³ Source: New York Times: *Homeland Security Stands by Its Fence*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/21/washington/21fence.html?pagewanted=2&sq=May%2021%202008&st=cse&scp=23>

Border walls fail to stop smuggling activity

Most drug smuggling occurs at official border crossings, and a border wall will have no impact on the bulk of it. Limited funding should instead be invested in modernizing port security. Drug smugglers continue to use underground tunnels and numerous other methods to circumvent the wall. One-third of all drugs confiscated in 2006 came through San Diego and Imperial County ports of entry, where there was a recently-built, double-layered border wall, compared to 24 percent the previous year.⁴ The wall also obstructs important cross-border visibility for Border Patrol agents, especially at oblique angles – putting both border security and agent safety at risk.



Smugglers easily cut holes in the wall. Photo: Matt Clark

A Billion-dollar speed bump or bottomless pit?

A 2009 GAO report revealed walls cost taxpayers at least **\$6.5 Million per mile** on average to build.⁵ This hefty price tag does not include mounting maintenance costs. Many security experts have questioned the efficacy of walls. A Border Patrol union spokesperson said, **“A fence will slow people down by a minute or two...”**⁶ Yet, it can take an hour or more for the Border Patrol to respond to an alarm triggered by an unauthorized crossing. As Border Patrol spokesperson Mike Scioli summed it up, **“The border fence is a speed bump in the desert.”**

“[the border] is a much more complicated problem than putting up a fence which someone can climb over with a ladder or tunnel under with a shovel.”⁷ - Former DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff

A May 2008 CRS report states that, **“...where fencing has been erected, there have been numerous breaches of the border fencing and a number of tunnels discovered crossing underneath the fencing. It stands to reason that even if border fencing is constructed over a significant portion of the land border, the incidences of fence breaches and underground tunnels would increase.”**⁸ The number of tunnels under the border has grown significantly since wall construction started. Between 1993 and 2001, authorities found only two underground passages across the border.⁸ Since 2001, they have discovered dozens of tunnels on the southern border.⁹ Breaches made with cutting torches and hacksaws are routinely found. Crews perform the endless, resource-consuming task of patching these holes. The National Guard calls repairs from continual breaches **“a bottomless pit”**.¹⁰ America cannot afford to perpetually pour precious financial resources into this fundamentally flawed approach to border security.

A false sense of security

A border wall will not protect America from cartels or terrorism. The Boston Marathon bombers and most of the 9/11 hijackers applied for and received legal visas – and all of these terrorists arrived on U.S. soil by air, not by land. Terrorists and cartels are sophisticated, and as such they will not be deterred by low-tech walls. America needs real solutions to address important border security and undocumented immigration challenges, not an ineffective, environmentally damaging and fiscally draining border wall.

⁴ Source: USCBP, http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/news_releases/archives/2006_news_releases/012006/01242006.xml

⁵ Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office Report, Secure Border Initiative Fence Construction Costs, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-244R>

⁶ Source: Associated Press on BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6090060.stm>

⁷ Source: Fox News, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,287573,00.html>

⁸ Source: USA Today, *In the Southwest, fixing the fence never ends*, http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-09-16-border-fence_N.htm

⁹ Source: Reuters, *Tunnel found under Mexico border crossing gate*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN2521094020070925>

¹⁰ Source: Reuters, *Tunnel found under Mexico border crossing gate*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN2521094020070925>