

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 12, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan and Chairman Frelinghuysen:

We urge you to oppose border wall funding in the Fiscal Year 2019 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) budget. This Congress has already spent close to \$2 billion on border-barrier construction despite the fact that the southwest border is more secure than ever. According to a September 2017 DHS report, “available data indicate that the southwest land border is more difficult to illegally cross today than ever before.”¹ DHS must provide us with concrete data showing the need and efficacy for such a wall. Moreover, Congress must take meaningful steps to address the administration’s cruel immigration policies of the past two years: family separation; tear gassing toddlers; illegal denial of asylum-seekers; relentless attacks on immigrant communities of color; and termination of the DACA program and grants of Temporary Protected Status.

While some may refer to this funding as simply for fencing, the fact is that such “fencing” is simply a “wall,” especially in its real-life effects. Indeed, President Trump recently installed a plaque on such fencing, touting it as his border wall.²

Construction has taken place this year along the southwest border, resulting in irreparable harm to border residents and their surroundings. Such construction moves quickly, thanks to a complete waiver of federal and other applicable laws and protections, including numerous environmental, Native-American, and other protections.³ Private property is seized by the government, wildlife species are endangered, migrant deaths and flooding soar, and border stakeholders’ voices are ignored throughout. We should not continue to fund this destruction and needless division.

A wall is a medieval approach to border security. For example, the vast majority of contraband is smuggled through ports of entry or, particularly in the case of opioids, international mail.⁴ We must have rational discussions about investing in modernizing ports of entry to improve border security and facilitate trade and travel.

DHS has repeatedly ignored oversight, evading accountability and misusing taxpayer funds. The agency has even failed to provide Congress with a risk-based border security plan—a report mandated in the FY 2018 omnibus to evaluate the billions in funding for Customs and Border Protection (CBP).⁵ This report, overdue since September 19, 2018, is vital for Congress to obtain

the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) evaluation of effectiveness, alternatives, and impacts of border security operations. We cannot be fiscally responsible and appraise the proposed 2019 DHS budget without this report. Indeed, serious past concerns about wall construction raised by GAO have not yet been addressed.⁶

We urge you to reject *all* border wall funding in FY 2019. Money should not go toward any new or expanded border fencing, levee walls, or conversion of existing barriers. The Senate FY 2019 DHS appropriations bill includes \$1.6 billion for wall construction that would wall off nearly all of south Texas' Rio Grande Valley, despoiling its unique natural gifts and cultural heritage. The House FY 2019 DHS appropriations bill includes a staggering \$5 billion for wall construction, which would inflict even more harm.

Polls show consistent national majorities oppose a border wall.⁷ Our decision not to fund any more destructive and ineffective border walls would send a values-based and fiscally responsible message to the American people. Our communities deserve better than to be divided and our taxpayers deserve accountability and transparency.

Sincerely,



PRAMILA JAYAPAL
Co-Chair
Congressional Progressive Caucus



MARK POCAN
Co-Chair
Congressional Progressive Caucus



JUDY CHU
Chair
Congressional Asian Pacific American
Caucus



CEDRIC RICHMOND
Chair
Congressional Black Caucus



JOAQUIN CASTRO
Chair-Elect
Congressional Hispanic Caucus

cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Democratic Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Nita M. Lowey, Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Appropriations

¹ Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, *Efforts by DHS to Estimate Southwest Border Security Between Ports of Entry* (Sep. 2017) available at:

https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/17_0914_estimates-of-border-security.pdf.

² See Department of Homeland Security Spokesperson Tyler Houlton statement (Oct. 26, 2018), available at

<https://twitter.com/SpoxDHS/status/1055980185449709571?s=19>.

³ Border communities care about construction's impact, not labels like wall or fence. In every respect, the funding already allocated by this Congress means wall-like barriers have been and are being "converted" or newly built across dozens of borderland miles. See Sierra Club, "Types of Border Wall," available at

https://content.sierraclub.org/creative-archive/sites/content.sierraclub.org/creative-archive/files/pdfs/1642%20BorderTypes_FactSheet_03_web.pdf.

⁴ See United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, COMBATING THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC: Intercepting Illicit Opioids at Ports of Entry, May 10, 2018, available at

<https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Combating%20the%20Opioid%20Epidemic%20-%20Intercepting%20Illicit%20Opioids%20at%20Ports%20of%20Entry%20-%20Final.pdf>.

⁵ See Section 231 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018, requiring the Secretary to submit to both Appropriations Committees, on or before September 19, 2018 a risk-based border-security plan.

⁶ United States Government Accountability Office, Southwest Border Security: CBP is Evaluating Designs and Locations for Border Barriers but Is Proceeding Without Key Information, July 2018, available at

<https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/693488.pdf>.

⁷ See Polling Report, Immigration/Border Security, available at <http://pollingreport.com/immigration.htm>.