



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Examining the Effect of the Border Wall on Private and Tribal Landowners

February 27, 2020

It is no secret that I am concerned with President Trump's border security policies. One of the most wasteful of these policies is his fixation on a boondoggle border wall. The President promised that Mexico would pay for the wall. Instead, he has left American taxpayers to foot the bill.

Worse still, hundreds of border residents will have their private land seized by the Administration in order to build Trump's wall. I would like to remind Members that the Federal government only owns roughly 35% of land at the U.S.-Mexico border. To construct hundreds of miles of new wall along the southwest border, the Federal government will have to take privately-owned land, one way or another.

Often, this private property provides for someone's livelihood or has been owned by families for generations. Takings on such a large and historic level as we are starting to see in south Texas are no small issue.

I would also remind Members that this Administration has taken advantage of its authority to waive all legal requirements to build border barriers. Each of the Trump Administration's Secretaries or Acting Secretaries of Homeland Security have allowed the Department and CBP to deliberately bypass dozens of laws in order to complete this partisan campaign promise "faster." Before the Trump Administration, this authority had only been used a total of five times during the Bush Administration. Since 2017, the Trump Administration has exercised this authority 16 times.

Most recently, Acting Secretary Wolf took the highly unprecedented approach of waiving procurement laws – further demonstrating the Executive overreach by the Trump Administration to deliver on the President's dream of a border wall along the southwest border.

However, the American public will not be fooled by this President's authoritarian actions and word games intended to hide the bad behavior of his Administration. We will never really know what (if anything) a border wall will do to secure our borders, but we do know and have seen that it will irreparably harm real people and the land they live on.

I am eager to hear from today's witnesses who have first-hand experience with the consequences border communities face due to the hasty construction of a border wall. In addition, I believe the committee should learn more about the impacts that communities are anticipating as the President diverts additional funding from the military to the border and begins the biggest seizure of private land in the history of the nation for his wall.

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