



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)
Full Committee Markup of H.R. 3548
October 4, 2017**

Before I share my thoughts on this bill, I would like to express my deep condolences to the nearly 60 families that lost loved ones and the over 500 people who were injured by a man, armed to the teeth, earlier this week in Las Vegas. I urge my colleagues to join with me and other gun owners to pass commonsense reforms to prevent further mass casualty attacks.

Turning to the matter at hand-- a central promise in President Trump's campaign was that he would build a "big, beautiful wall" across the entire Southern border and Mexico would pay for it. There was a time, in the not too distant past, when this Committee cared about facts, data, and results.

We supported DHS having a border strategy, collecting metrics on the effectiveness of operations, and deploying personnel, equipment, and infrastructure to adjust to threats.

Last month, the Department of Homeland Security provided evidence that our responsible approach to border security is paying off. In its 20-page report, DHS concluded "available data indicate that the southwest land border is more difficult to illegally cross today than ever before." DHS found that the inflow of illegal crossers is down as are apprehensions rates. It is getting harder and harder to cross, and less people are trying.

Yet, here we are today, considering a misguided, unnecessary, fiscally-irresponsible measure to formally authorize President Trump's Wall at all costs. We will hear throughout the day that this is a \$15 billion bill. Actually, the costs are much higher and, one thing is for sure, they will not be borne by Mexico. It will be American taxpayers, landowners, the environment, and Native Americans that will bear the costs.

I have seen estimates that construction costs for the Wall could be between \$20 to \$70 billion, and, since H.R. 3548 does not include any mileage limitations, specifications, or cost controls, there is no telling how much it will actually cost to build.

Today, the Federal government only owns a third of those sections of the Southwest

border that do not have physical barriers.

As such, to fulfill President Trump's promise of a "big, beautiful wall," H.R. 3548 would trigger the most extensive Federal Takings that this nation has seen in years.

This is not just my expectation. The President made it clear that he expects to pursue legal actions against ranchers and small landowners and wants to hire a team of eminent domain attorneys to do it.

If history is any indication, when the Federal government wants land to build barriers, it is ranchers and small landowners who bare the biggest costs. A decade after the Secure Fence Act, there are still 93 Americans waiting to get paid for land taken by the Federal government. The Federal government might just see a quarter acre of land as worth a couple hundred dollars but to a landowner who has had it in his family for generations, it is priceless.

Additionally, the environment along the border would be harmed. Big Bend National Park, Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, and other Federal lands would be carved up. Also carved up would be the habitat and endangered species that they protect. It would make it difficult for wildlife to move across the border including American Jaguars and ocelots—which have begun to return to various parts of the U.S. after a long absence.

A 28,000 member Native American tribe, the Tohono O'odham Nation would also pay a steep price. This tribe controls 75 miles along the U.S.-Mexico border and one tribe member explained, the wall would cut "through our ancestral land, and it divides families that have been able to go back and forth freely since before the border line was drawn."

The bill has hidden costs too. On the top of page 73, it states, "There are authorized to be appropriated to U.S. Customs and Border Protection such sums as may be necessary..." to increase the annual rate of basic pay of CBP employees. I believe that CBP personnel should be adequately paid but the way this bill goes about it calls into question the seriousness of this effort.

This "such sums" language and the absence of offsets for the \$15 billion authorization violate the General Protocols issued by Republican House Leadership for bills to be considered in the 115th Congress.

The bill before us would authorize Trump's Border Wall at all costs. It is a \$15 billion boondoggle that abandons past bipartisan efforts to stop throwing money at the border in an ad hoc way in favor of strategically deploying resources. I hope that after today, we can have a serious conversation about the border and move forward together in a productive manner.

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