

Trump refers to many walls as he fights for border money

Catherine Lucey

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Everywhere President Donald Trump looks, he sees a wall.

As he lobbies for money for his long-promised border wall, Trump keeps talking up other barricades. He's pointing to walls in Israel, at the Vatican, even at former President Barack Obama's house — though fact checkers have pushed back on the accuracy of some of his claims.

With bricks and mortar on his mind, Trump declared at a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, "Walls work."

He added: "There's a reason why politicians and wealthy people build walls around their houses and their compounds. President Obama recently built a wall around his compound."

Trump also tweeted that Obama's wall was 10 feet high. But while fencing has been added around the Obamas' spacious house in Washington's tony Kalorama neighborhood, there is no 10-foot wall.

It's all part of Trump's effort to prevail in an increasingly difficult standoff with congressional Democrats over border funding that has produced a partial shutdown of the federal government.

But David Bier, an immigration policy analyst for the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, said there is little comparison between the demands for private security and border security.

"It doesn't make sense to compare" the two, said Bier, pointing to the difference between a home break-in and migrants trying to seek asylum.

Another favorite structure for Trump is the fortifications at the Vatican, which he has cited in the past as an argument for the wall and brought up again at the Cabinet meeting, this time making a moral argument.

"When they say the wall is immoral, well then you better — got to do something about the Vatican, because the Vatican has the biggest wall of them all," Trump said.

Much of Vatican City is off-limits to the general public but walls there do not block all access. St. Peter's Square is not behind any walls. The Vatican Museums are walled but the public may enter with a ticket and security screening.

Trump's immigration policies have drawn criticism from Pope Francis, who has said in the past that anyone who wants to build walls to keep out migrants is "not Christian."

Former Trump aide Sam Nunberg said that in some of these examples, Trump was trying to argue that his opponents are saying “do as I say, not as I do.”

Trump and allies have repeatedly cited barriers in Israel as proof that walls are effective. Trump said this week he had recently spoken with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, adding “In Israel, as you know, they built a wall. He said 99.9 percent it works. And it would with us too.”

Bier said a direct comparison with Israel’s border security is challenging because the U.S. border is much longer and has different terrain, including mountains, raising questions about whether building a physical wall is the best approach.

“I think it’s fair to say that border barriers make it easier to catch people who are coming into the country,” Bier said. “The question is whether it is as effective in areas where the president wants to build.”

With no end to the border fight in sight, Trump is likely to keep up his wall commentary — although at times his rhetoric sends mixed messages.

His message Thursday: “You can call it a wall. You can call it a barrier. You can call it whatever you want.”