



In Our View: Sensible Security

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Border security is essential to the peace and prosperity of the United States. Each nation has a right to control who crosses its borders and a duty to enforce its immigration laws.

But as President Trump prepares to address the nation tonight amid a lingering partial shutdown of the federal government, it is evident that a wall along the border between the United States and Mexico is not the best way to ensure that security. Support for a wall, which was the centerpiece of Trump's successful 2016 campaign, does not make economic or environmental sense, nor does it promise to enhance security to the extent the president claims.

This is not a conclusion driven by reflexive anti-Trumpism — although it can be difficult for people on both sides of the issue to think clearly in such a polarized political climate. This is a conclusion supported by logical thinking and by numerous conservative writers over the past several years. As David Bier, a policy analyst for the Libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, wrote in 2017: “To put it most simply, border barriers will never stop illegal immigration, because a wall or fence cannot apprehend crossers.”

With or without a wall, enhanced patrols will be required to stem illegal crossings, meaning that efforts to improve border security should focus on increased enforcement. As a Fox News report detailed, border agents say a wall is “meaningless” without agents and technology to back it up.

The border between the United States and Mexico is 1,933 miles long. Some of that would be protected by natural barriers such as rivers and mountains, and most estimates place construction of a wall for the remaining areas at \$25 to \$30 billion. Add in another \$500 million or so for annual maintenance, and it becomes clear that money would be more effectively spent on people rather than concrete or steel slats or whatever form Trump's vanity project is taking these days.

Unfortunately, that is what Trump's wall has become — a monument to his ego. The fact is that most undocumented immigrants arrive legally and overstay their visas. A wall would not prevent that. Another fact is that, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration, almost all illegal drugs coming into this country arrive through legal ports of entry, hidden in shipping containers or among legitimate goods in tractor-trailers. A wall would not prevent that.

Setting aside, for a moment, the efficacy of a wall, we also must call out the president on a couple related issues. In forcing a government shutdown while demanding more than \$5 billion from Congress toward a wall, Trump has ignored one of his central campaign promises. He repeatedly claimed that Mexico would pay for a wall — a laughable assertion to begin with. Now he is forcing thousands of American taxpayers to go without paychecks while holding the public hostage for funding he claimed would come from Mexico. He also claimed that he would take blame or credit for the shutdown, but since has repeatedly pointed fingers at Democrats. Trump's ability to make deals apparently is not as pronounced as he claimed, and Senate

Republicans are refusing to consider a spending bill to end the shutdown — a bill they recently unanimously approved.

All of that is a sideshow to important discussions about national security, but it does not alter an inescapable conclusion. As Blair wrote for Cato Institute, “President Trump’s wall would be a mammoth expenditure that would have little impact on illegal immigration.” The United States needs sensible border security rather than a monument to stubbornness.