



Republicans seek to reinstate border wall construction funding

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March 18, 2021

Dive Brief:

- Forty U.S. Republican senators on Wednesday sent a letter to the U.S. Government Accountability Office Comptroller Gene L. Dodaro asking him for a legal opinion as to whether President Joe Biden's suspension of U.S.-Mexico border wall construction and a freeze on funding for those projects violates the Impoundment Control Act.
- The act prevents the president, the senators wrote, from unilaterally withholding funds obligated by Congress. Since fiscal year 2018, Congress has provided almost \$5.6 billion for barrier system and pedestrian fencing construction, providing almost \$1.4 billion annually from 2018 through 2021.
- The senators wrote that illegal border crossings between 2019 and 2020 in areas where new barriers had been built decreased by 87%. Since Biden has halted construction and related funding, they said, illegal crossings increased 173%. "Prompt action to end these violations (of the ICA) is required to restore order at the barrier," they told Dodaro.

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Biden's order gave federal agencies like the Department of Homeland Security 60 days to come up with a plan to redirect border wall funds and to determine how much of the wall under construction should resume or be modified or terminated. That order expires Saturday, March 20.

There have been no further directives, and no agency has announced that construction contracts have been formally modified or terminated. In addition, there have been no announcements that border wall construction will resume.

David Bier, an immigration analyst with the Cato Institute told Business Insider that the Biden administration is busy trying to get control of the increase in illegal border crossings. The president, he said, is likely to extend the order and give agencies more time to come up with a plan.

The Center for Biological Diversity has been monitoring the shuttered wall project sites and said that contractors have not yet demobilized. The center wants the administration to stop construction permanently, potentially tear down portions of the wall, and restore and remediate areas along the border that were damaged during construction.

In the absence of a federal border wall plan, a Texas state lawmaker has stepped in. Earlier this month, Republican Rep. Bryan Slaton introduced legislation that would continue construction of

a wall along its border with Mexico and invest in ports of entry infrastructure. If passed by the Texas legislature, the state would initially fund the projects but seek reimbursement from the federal government.