



## President Trump's wildly expensive border wall policy will leave a lasting legacy

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President Trump vowed to build 450 miles of border “wall” — which is more of a series of barriers erected by a succession of U.S. presidents, by the end of his first term.

Trump can say he fulfilled that promise, according to information provided to Yahoo Finance by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), establishing one of the more expensive and permanent aspects of his legacy.

“As much as the Trump administration is able to construct is going to be the amount that’s there pretty permanently,” Jessica Bolter, an associate policy analyst for the Migration Policy Institute, told Yahoo Finance. “This is a serious permanent infrastructure project that’s going to remain. And while many of the other actions that Trump has taken on immigration can be rolled back through executive action, this is something that it looks like is not going to be rolled back anytime soon.”

According to the latest CBP data, 453 miles of “new primary and secondary border wall system” were built during Trump’s term — though much of that construction involved replacing “dilapidated of outdate designs” as opposed to building wall where it had not been built previously. Another 211 miles are under construction while 74 miles are in the pre-construction phase.

Overall, the \$15-billion initiative was a key promise of Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign and became a point of contention with Congress — a funding dispute over the border wall led to a 35-day government shutdown in 2018 — and landowners whose properties have been greatly impacted by the construction.

President-elect Joe Biden has vowed to freeze construction of the wall, a move that would save roughly \$2.6 billion.



### Border Wall Status – January 8, 2021

#### Current State of the Border

- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has ~701 miles of primary barriers and ~70 miles of secondary barriers on the southwest border:
  - ~197 miles of pedestrian fencing, ~106 miles of vehicle barrier and ~15 miles of secondary fencing constructed *prior to* January 2017;
  - ~398 miles of new primary and ~55 miles of new secondary border wall system constructed *since* January 2017.

#### Overview of Progress- ~\$15 billion (~738 total miles)

- Since January 2017, ~\$15 billion has been identified to construct ~738 miles of new border wall system through a combination of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Defense (DoD) funding and the Treasury Forfeiture Fund (TFF). Funding received supports planning, design, real estate, environmental, construction and oversight activities.
  - ~453 miles of new primary and secondary border wall system have been constructed, in place of dilapidated and outdated designs and in locations where no barriers previously existed, within the U.S. Border Patrol’s (USBP) San Diego, El Centro, Yuma, Tucson, El Paso, Del Rio, and Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Sectors.
  - ~211 miles of new primary and secondary border wall system are under construction, in place of dilapidated and outdated designs and in locations where no barriers previously existed, within the San Diego, El Centro, Yuma, Tucson, El Paso, Del Rio, Laredo and RGV Sectors.
  - ~74 miles of new primary and secondary border wall system are in the pre-construction phase, in locations where no barriers currently exist, primarily within the San Diego, El Centro, El Paso and Laredo Sectors.

New Primary Wall	New Secondary Wall	New Primary Wall	New Secondary Wall	Total
<i>In place of dilapidated and/or outdated designs</i>		<i>In locations where no barriers previously existed</i>		
~375 miles	~25 miles	~281 miles	~57 miles	~738 miles FUNDED
~351 miles	~22 miles	~47 miles	~33 miles	~453 miles COMPLETE

453 miles of wall have been completed so far. (Source: CBP)

#### **‘It’s a gigantic waste of government resources’**

Experts have argued the entire project was a waste of taxpayer money (in addition to being a magnet for alleged fraud).

“It’s a gigantic waste of government resources, taking billions of dollars away from other priorities and has zero benefit to the United States,” David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, told Yahoo Finance. “The difference between the Trump law and the existing fences that he replaced is the Trump wall is more expensive and that’s pretty much it. It’s certainly more intrusive to the environment and to the landowners and to the residents of the areas in which the border wall is being built as well.”

The wall built under Trump has been incredibly costly, particularly compared to other presidencies.

Between 2007 and 2015, CBP spent a total of \$2.4 billion constructing 535 miles of the border wall. Part of the reason for that, she explained, is because Trump's wall is a taller, more fortified wall being constructed in a lot of areas. Bolter noted that fencing under the GWB administration cost an average of \$3.9 million per mile. Under Trump, it averaged about \$20 million per mile.



There are approximately 701 miles of primary barriers along the border. (Graphic: David Foster/Yahoo Finance)

Another reason for the exorbitant cost is that it's "not clear that building a wall in all of these places was necessary," Bolter said. "A report from the Department of Homeland Security inspector general found that when CBP was setting its border wall priorities, it didn't consider alternatives."

Ohio State University Professor Ken Madsen, who tracks border wall progress, noted that when we "see new fences or walls going in those very rugged areas, it seems to me it really is for show. It's not really doing anything to stop anybody because very few people were crossing there in the first place."

Gil Kerlikowske, who served as CBP commissioner during the final three years of the Obama administration, has argued that the money would be "much better invested in technology than barriers." He noted that much of the cost for the barriers stems from maintenance and repair.

“I mean, it’s really significant,” Kerlikowske told Yahoo Finance. “You have flooding, you have other kinds of damage, people, of course, cutting them. So people shouldn’t look at this just as the cost of this fixed wall or barrier. They should look at the long-term costs. They are going to be replaced over the years, plus maintenance costs, so it’s incredibly expensive.”

The former CBP leader suggested technological alternatives like integrated fixed towers, which have infrared and camera sensors. But according to Bier, the Cato analyst, it’s still just another form of wasted taxpayer money.

“It’s certainly better than taking people’s land but it’s another gigantic sinkhole of government money that you spent billions upon billions, spending more money on technology, whether it’s border journals or surveillance cameras,” Bier said. “Really at the end of the day, you have reports from the OIG, the GAO, the drones and balances are ineffective. That virtual fence they tried to build with the cameras and sensors was useless, a waste of taxpayer money. I don’t support any more money for this effort.”

Biden freezing construction of the wall is just one of the several necessary steps needed to fix this, Bier argued.

“A freeze is better than continuing to waste taxpayer money on something that we’re getting no benefit from,” he said. “But I think that we should go further than that and transfer that land and the structure as well — if the people who own the land want the structure, let them keep it, but it should really be their decision and not the decision of Border Patrol to foist a structure on somebody else’s property.”

### **‘New’ versus ‘old’ wall**

Trump’s CBP claimed that 453 miles of border wall were built since January 2017, though less than 100 miles of the wall is actually new and not replacing outdated structures.

“[Former Acting Secretary of Homeland Security] Chad Wolf and CBP are counting anything as new that’s new construction,” Madsen told Yahoo Finance. “But most people are making a distinction between new versus replacement. There was a wall there before and yes there’s a new wall now, but it’s the same place that’s covered. But then you can even narrow that down more.”

Much of the construction is to replace existing barriers, many of which are old and/or dilapidated in quality.

“Once you distinguish new from replacement, then you have to distinguish if it’s a pedestrian barrier, or replacement pedestrian barrier,” Madsen said. “In other words, is it just a newer model that’s taller, more see-through, more durable, stronger foundation? And then there’s some places where they’re replacing vehicle barriers with pedestrian barriers.”

That makes sense since pedestrian barriers are much more effective at stopping people than vehicle barriers so “that’s quite an upgrade. That’s substantially changing the dynamic. And again, because it’s all new, it’s being counted by CBP as new. I’ve heard the vast majority is replacing barriers that are already there. That’s for sure. So most of what’s being constructed is just replacing what’s already there.”

### **‘Building a wall will do little to deter criminals’**

President-elect Biden has been critical about the border wall, singling out Trump for the wall’s lack of efficiency.

“His obsession with building a wall does nothing to address security challenges while costing taxpayers billions of dollars,” Biden’s immigration plan states, noting that most illegal drugs come through legal points of entry, that asylum seekers are asking for refuge legally, and that nearly half of undocumented immigrants are in the U.S. because they overstayed their visas.

“Building a wall will do little to deter criminals and cartels seeking to exploit our borders,” his plan says. “Instead of stealing resources from schools for military children and recovery efforts in Puerto Rico, Biden will direct federal resources to smart border enforcement efforts, like investments in improving screening infrastructure at our ports of entry, that will actually keep America safer.”

Biden’s decision to halt construction of the wall will save billions of dollars, but could still cost roughly \$700 million, according to the Washington Post. This is because withdrawing crew, materials, and equipment can be billed as “demobilization fees.”

But, it will come as a relief for those whose lands were seized by the government through eminent domain to be used as part of the border wall. According to the New York Times, the Trump administration brought 78 lawsuits against landowners along the southern border, with 30 of them in 2020.

Despite the havoc along the border soon coming to an end, the project still leaves behind a lasting legacy.

“I think that the border wall is one of the most permanent parts of President Trump’s legacy after he leaves the office,” Bolter said. “President-elect Biden has said that he’s not going to construct any additional border wall, but he’s also said that he’s not going to take down any of the wall that President Trump has built.”