



## **Mr. Trump, Tear Down This Wall!**

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Donald Trump boasts that he's a builder, but as president his specialty is tearing things down. Trump's policy approach—from the environment to health care to foreign alliances—is to dismantle, to attack, and to sow division. Few things better represent Trump's destructive method of governing than his \$70 billion border-wall boondoggle.

The rationale for a wall along the United States–Mexico border isn't based on solving real problems; the wall is simply about pandering to, and inflaming, the ugly xenophobia of Trump's most diehard supporters. If built, the wall wouldn't stop illegal border crossings, but it would devastate the unique landscapes it divided.

The 2,000-mile frontier between the United States and Mexico encompasses wetlands, deserts, and mountains. The borderlands are home to more than 1,500 native plant and animal species, many of which are endangered or threatened, including jaguars, ocelots, antelope, bison, and wolves. This abundant biological diversity is already under pressure from industrial development and climate change—and a vast concrete barrier would only worsen the situation.

If Trump's monument to narrow-minded nationalism was ever built, the damage would start with the construction itself and all the infrastructure that came with it. Thanks to sweeping legislation passed in the wake of the September 11 attacks, construction would be exempt from the most basic environmental safeguards, including the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

Bulldozers tearing through wildlands is just the first environmental danger posed by border militarization. Walls and other barriers cut wildlife off from food and water sources. Border barriers also make it more difficult for struggling animal populations to increase their numbers and maintain genetic diversity; only about 100 Mexican gray wolves remain in the wild, and Texas has as few as 80 ocelots. Some species are naturally migratory; others will be forced to shift to new habitats owing to the changing climate. Either way, a wall makes movement impossible.

For now, the wall is mostly a looming threat—a figment of Trump's feverish imagination. The rest of Trump's immigration and border policies, in contrast, are having tragic consequences

already. Trump's obsessive hostility toward immigrants led to more than 2,000 children being separated from their parents—an act that the United Nations Human Rights Council declared a human rights violation. Meanwhile, border militarization has increased, making crossing more dangerous. Even though fewer people have been trying to enter the United States, more of them are dying in the process. In 2017, more than 400 people lost their lives making the attempt, including at least seven children.

Why, exactly, are we condemning people to drown or to die of thirst and exposure? Trump claims that border militarization is a matter of security. Yet there is no evidence that immigrants and asylum seekers are especially violent; in fact, according to a study by the libertarian Cato Institute, native-born residents in Texas are more than twice as likely to be convicted of a crime as immigrants—legal or undocumented—living in the state. Instead of attacking immigrants, we should be acknowledging their enormous contributions to this country—and the best way to do so would be for Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship.

In the end, Trump's expensive, destructive, and ultimately ineffective border-wall fantasy does serve one purpose: It's a perfect metaphor for his presidency. Trump's proposed wall isn't about closing a fictional "open border" but about taking a fear-based, isolationist ideology and making it (literally) concrete. It's the same flawed thinking that says we should ignore global warming—as if we could build a wall to keep the climate out too.

Fear and ignorance are never a sound basis for problem-solving. Whether we're talking about our borders or our climate, there's no way we can protect ourselves or the planet by turning our backs on the world.