

Abdul: Donald Trump's wall won't work

Abdul-Hakim Shabazz

September 21, 2017

Stevie Wonder can see that Donald Trump's border wall won't work. But for some reason, the president's staunchest supporters can't seem to grasp that concept.

Trump wants money for his wall as part of any plan that would allow the children of illegal immigrants who meet certain criteria (Dreamers) to stay in the United States. I could go on about how I would rather have a Dreamer living and working in this country than a lazy American who can't get a job in a time of 4 percent unemployment, but that's another column for another time.

But back to the wall.

The wall won't work because the U.S.-Mexico border is nearly 2,000 miles long. It runs through four states: Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. The terrain is much more than a desert. It includes two rivers, the Colorado and Rio Grande, as well as farmland, mountains and deltas. Trying to build a nearly 2,000-mile wall across the border would be quite a feat of engineering.

But that's just the physical challenges; there's also a big legal problem with Trump's wall. It's called eminent domain.

Along that 2,000-mile border, the General Accounting Office says the federal government and Native American tribes own only about 33 percent of the land. The rest is private property or owned by the states. A study by the Cato Institute showed that thousands of landowners would have their property taken from them to build the wall. Maybe Trump can get Mexico to write them a check, too.

It's important to understand that a wall would not keep out most illegal immigrants. That's because most don't sneak across the border; they come here legally and overstay their visas. The Center for Migration Studies found that since 2007 more undocumented aliens came to the United States on a visa and then overstayed versus those who illegally crossed the U.S.-Mexico border. In the past 10 years, visa overstays have surpassed illegal border crossings by 600,000. Most of those who overstayed were from Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq. So if we're going to build a wall, we might want to start near Kabul or Baghdad.

Even if the wall were built, I'm not convinced it would work. Let's give the administration credit where it's due. Illegal border crossings are already down about 52 percent. So what would a wall add?

Walls also are made to climb over, tunnel under or even dig through. And 2,000 miles of wall is a lot to monitor.

Now despite my realism, you can have better border security, but a wall is not the way to do it. Better electronic surveillance and drones would do more than a wall to stop folks en route.

Here's a thought, with the hard time many employers are having in finding workers these days, maybe we ought to bring more people here instead of trying to keep them out. If someone is willing to risk his life to run, jump or swim to America so he can cut our grass, pick our lettuce and clean our hotel rooms, he probably has a good work ethic.