Proposal to expand border walls and boots will harm public safety

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December 7, 2017

On Nov. 21, Senate Republicans quietly unveiled their proposal for the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) fiscal year 2018 budget. If passed in December, the bill would fully fund President Trump's request to expand the border wall and hire an additional 500 Border Patrol agents.

For millions of residents who call border communities home, President Trump's border wall was never about national security. It's political theater intended to stoke division and justify more wasteful, discriminatory policing of our communities.

Congress has already **invested** billions to highly militarize border towns with hundreds of miles of walls and surveillance technologies developed for theaters of war. Since 2004, Congress also **doubled** the number of Border Patrol agents hired by our nation's largest police force — U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

This has led not only to a large number of agents, but a poorly-trained, heavily armed police force responsible for widespread racial profiling and **dozens** of unjustified killings and brutal beatings.

CBP's own former head of internal affairs has **called** dozens of Border Patrol shootings he reviewed "highly questionable" and alleged supervisors changed or distorted facts to cover up wrongdoing.

Left unchecked, border agents also regularly **abuse** their authority to stop, frisk and interrogate New Mexicans at interior checkpoints located up to 100 miles into the country. These checkpoints disrupt daily commutes to work, school or to run basic errands in Las Cruces, with little to show for it.

The Government Accountability Office recently **concluded** Border Patrol's interior checkpoints accounted for 2 percent of total apprehensions nationwide from fiscal years 2013–2016. An investigation of government documents **obtained** by the ACLU reached similar conclusions and uncovered complaints far outnumbered apprehensions at certain checkpoints in Arizona.

At the end of the day, our nation's immigration laws and how they're enforced should be guided by a simple goal.

Unfortunately, the Border Patrol's misguided practices too often undermine border communities' **safety** by instilling fear, not trust, among residents.

Already this year, border agents have **harassed** DACA recipients at checkpoints and swiftly **deported** Dreamers, **detained** parents waiting in a hospital for their infant's emergency

surgery, and **arrested** a 10-year-old girl with cerebral palsy, who languished for days in a government shelter while her parents anxiously awaited her return home in Laredo, Texas.

The agency also refuses to collect basic demographic information on who agents stop and search, a widely accepted police best practice. New Mexicans regularly report to our office harassment by border agents based on their race or ethnicity.

In a state that values diversity, these practices leave over half of our community **feeling** like second-class citizens and make our communities less safe for everyone.

DHS recently **concluded** the border is more secure than ever before. Their Inspector General also **found** insufficient data to justify the Trump Administration's request to hire thousands of new Border Patrol and ICE agents.

As CATO Institute recently **cautioned**, hiring more agents isn't only unnecessary but dangerous given Border Patrol's disproportionate rate of corruption and misconduct compared to other federal agencies.

Rather than grant Trump's request to build a wasteful, divisive wall or expand his deportation force, Congress should invest in bipartisan solutions that expand oversight and accountability for CBP.

This fall alone, Rep. Martha McSally, R-Arizona, expressed bipartisan agreement to add investigators to CBP's Office of Professional Responsibility, the House narrowly failed to pass an amendment to equip agents with body-worn cameras in a bipartisan floor vote, and Congressman Steve Pearce, R-N.M., again **partnered** with Congressman Beto O'Rourke, D-Texas, to re-introduce their Border Enforcement Accountability, Oversight, and Community Engagement Act.

As Congress debates next year's budget, New Mexico's senators should join in publicly supporting reforms that ensure border agents treat all New Mexicans with respect and work to block Trump's request to rapidly hire new agents.

Failure to do so would repeat the mistakes of the past with disastrous consequences for public safety.