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What the Executive Order to Build a Border Wall Actually Means

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January 26, 2017

President Donald Trump signed an executive order this week setting in motion his plan to build a massive wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. Now, Americans are trying to figure out: What does it actually mean?

"This is border security," Trump said Wednesday as he signed the order. "We've been talking about this from the beginning," he said. "This is going to bring it over the top."

A White House press release about the executive order says it will "secure the southern border of the United States through the immediate construction of a physical wall on the southern border." But funding needs to come from Congress.

"How is he going to fund it? You need money!" Rand Beers, a former acting Department of Homeland Security secretary in the Obama administration, told The Washington Post. "He's got to have the money. And you can't reprogram all that money without congressional authorization."

What the order primarily seems to do is signal the president's intent to fulfill one of his key campaign promises. Trump's administration is building a case for the wall by listing three laws in the executive order as authority for its construction:

- Immigration and Nationality Act
- Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996
- The Secure Fence Act of 2006

The Immigration and Nationality Act refers to quota limits for immigration into the U.S., and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act is a landmark immigration law that expanded eligibility for deportation. The Secure Fence Act allowed Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama to build up to 700 miles of fence along the U.S. Mexico border, of which they built 652 miles, according to USA Today.

Despite the executive order, Congress still has to approve funding.

The U.S-Mexico border is more than 1,900 miles long, and the Republican-controlled Congress would have to approve funding to complete any wall. Current estimates put the cost in the wide range of \$15 billion to \$40 billion, according to NPR.

That's not the only issue.

"I think the rhetoric would center around the huge cost, but there are other things that could be obstacles," Morris Levy, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Southern California told ATTN:. "A lot of it would have to cross private property on the Mexican border."

The construction of the wall could require the use of eminent domain, or forcibly requiring private owners to sell their land on the border to the federal government. That was used to build the existing barriers.

"That means that if Trump's plan to build another 1,000 miles of wall is carried to fruition, thousands more homeowners will see their property destroyed or partially walled-off," Randal John Meyer of the Cato Institute wrote in an a piece for The Daily Beast.

Will the border wall work?

"Building this barrier is more than just a campaign promise, it's a common sense first step to really securing our porous border," Sean Spicer, White House press secretary, told reporters. "This will stem the flow of drugs, crime, illegal immigration into the United States."

Many people doubt the border wall will be effective, however, including Trump's Homeland Security Secretary, retired Marine Gen. John F. Kelly. At his confirmation hearing, Kelly said a "physical barrier will not do the job." As for crime, research has consistently shown immigrant populations have lower incarceration rates than native-born U.S. citizens.

"The notion that a whole bunch of people are immigrating here with the intention of wreaking havoc in the U.S. is largely a fantasy," Levy said. "It's not to say that undocumented immigrants don't commit crime, but the idea that this is a particularly crime prone group does not square well."