



Texas governor plans to resume construction of Trump's border wall with or without Biden's help

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Texas Gov. Greg Abbott declared a disaster in 34 counties in his state on May 31, allowing him to free up funds allocated by the Legislature to resume construction of a wall along the southern border started under President Donald Trump and abandoned by President Biden.

“Texas will build a border wall in our state to help secure our border,” Abbott, a Republican, said at a press conference last week where he announced his unprecedented plan to use \$250 million of state funds as a “down payment” on the new wall.

“The Biden administration has abandoned its responsibility to apply federal law to secure the border and to enforce the immigration laws, and Texans are suffering as a consequence of that neglect by the Biden administration,” Abbott added. “In the federal government’s absence, Texas is stepping up to get the job done.”

The number of migrants arriving at the U.S. border has steadily grown since last spring. In the month of May, border patrol agents “encountered 180,034 people attempting entry along the Southwest Border,” U.S. Customs and Border Protection said on its website. That figure represents about a 1 percent rise from the month before. In May 2020, as the coronavirus pandemic was still in its first wave in the U.S. and Mexico, 21,593 migrants were encountered by CBP agents along the southern border, the agency’s records show. During the Trump administration, border encounters hit a high of 132,856 in May 2019, according to CBP data.

The overwhelming majority of migrants who have attempted to enter the U.S. this spring have been turned away under Title 42, a health care provision, utilized under Trump and continued during the Biden administration, that justifies the expulsion of migrants seeking asylum on the grounds that they represent a threat to public health.

Policy experts don’t believe that Abbott, or any governor, has the authority to supersede federal policy regarding immigration.

“Immigration authority largely falls under the federal government level and there has been legislation after legislation that has supported that framework,” Ariel Ruiz, a policy analyst for the Washington-based Migration Policy Institute, told the Texas Tribune. “Even if there were legal avenues for Texas to do [this], it’ll end up in a number of legal issues for sure.”

The League of United Latin American Citizens, or LULAC, the oldest and largest Latino civil rights organization in the country, has already threatened to sue Abbott if he goes through with his plan to continue construction on the border wall.

“We believe that the governor has no authority constitutionally, either under state law or federal law, to build a wall or to arrest immigrants for trespassing,” LULAC national president Domingo Garcia told Yahoo News. “The U.S. Constitution clearly says that only the federal government can do that, and that means President Biden and Border Patrol. ... He’s using children as political piñatas.”

Resumption of construction on the wall isn’t the only action Abbott is taking to thwart a rise in border crossings. On June 10, he and Arizona’s Republican Gov. Doug Ducey penned a letter to the governors of the other 48 states requesting law enforcement manpower to help counter what they characterized as a rise in activity by drug cartels.

“Border states like Texas and Arizona are ‘ground zero’ for this crisis and bear a disproportionate share of those burdens,” Abbott and Ducey said in the [letter](#).

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican and staunch Trump ally, quickly stepped up to offer resources and manpower from his state.

“I’m proud to announce today that the state of Florida is answering the call,” DeSantis said at a [press conference](#) last week. “Florida has your back.”

He went on to blame Florida’s rising crime rate on a spike in immigration.

“We have problems in Florida that are not organic to Florida, that we’ve been forced to deal with over many years but particularly over the last six months, because of the failure of the Biden administration to secure our southern border and indeed to really do anything constructive about what is going on in the southern border,” DeSantis said.

Democratic lawmakers in Florida, meanwhile, were quick to criticize DeSantis for redirecting state resources to Texas.

“Another political stunt by @GovRonDeSantis,” Democratic state Rep. Anna Eskamani [tweeted](#) on June 16. “Instead of perpetuating the attacks on immigrants & going after [the] Biden Administration why don’t you focus on the people who live in FL! We’re dealing w/a broken unemployment system & affordable housing crisis that you could be fixing!”

“Diverting state law enforcement to Texas and Arizona is a political stunt that makes our state less safe,” Democratic U.S. Rep. Charlie Christ [tweeted](#).

The legality of Abbott’s plan to use funds allocated for disaster relief will almost certainly be decided in court.

But Abbott, who is up for reelection next year, doesn't appear fazed by threats of lawsuits. Construction of a border wall, after all, was a winning political issue in 2016 for Trump.

While 450 miles of metal barrier were constructed during Trump's term using diverted military funds, the majority of effort went to replace sections of the 654 miles of fencing already in place before he took office. Moreover, the former president's promise that Mexico would ultimately pay for the barrier did not materialize.

With eminent domain issues also complicating construction of the wall in certain parts of the state, Abbott is banking on donations of both land and money in order to realize his goal of sealing the Texas border with Mexico.

"My belief, based upon conversations that I've already had, is that the combination of state land as well as volunteer land will yield hundreds of miles to build a border wall in Texas," Abbott said last week.

A outspoken critic of the border wall plan, Democratic activist Sawyer Hackett said Abbott's plan shows he is concerned with reelection and "is willing to use his office and taxpayer dollars to shore up support from the base by building Trump's useless pet project."

"[Abbott] doesn't care about border communities or about migrants — he cares about staying in office by whatever means possible," Hackett said. "Instead of wasting taxpayer dollars on trying to take Texans' land, he should focus on keeping the lights on."

Yet Abbott's ambitions may extend beyond simply retaining control of his current position.

"When Greg Abbott last week unveiled plans to build a wall along the nation's southern border with Mexico, he showed that his aspirations are much higher than being reelected as Texas governor," Dallas Morning News political columnist Grover Jeffers Jr. wrote Monday. "Abbott wants to be the heir apparent to former President Donald Trump and his political movement."

Trump has already accepted an invitation from Abbott to visit the border on June 30. If Trump doesn't run in 2024, his supporters will be looking for someone to back. DeSantis is already on the shortlist of possible GOP contenders, and part of securing the support of Trump's legion of fans is keeping the focus on the U.S. border with Mexico.

Abbott's and Ducey's offices did not reply to Yahoo News' request for comment.

Christina Pushaw, DeSantis's press secretary, told Yahoo News in an email that the push to secure the border in states like Texas would ultimately help Floridians by lowering crime rates.

"Even though Florida isn't a border state, securing the southern border would help stop the flow of illegal drugs that end up in our state and ravage our communities," Pushaw said. "Illegal immigrants have also committed crimes in Florida, which could have been prevented if our immigration laws were enforced."

A 2018 study by the Cato Institute, however, found that “the criminal conviction rate for legal immigrants was about 85 percent below the native-born rate.”