



STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN IMMIGRATION COUNCIL

SUBMITTED TO THE HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

HEARING ON “ENDING THE CRISIS: AMERICA’S BORDERS AND THE PATH TO SECURITY”

February 7, 2017

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The American Immigration Council (Immigration Council) is a non-profit organization which for over 25 years has been dedicated to increasing public understanding of immigration law and policy and the role of immigration in American society. We write to share our analysis and research regarding an unnecessary border wall and the already massive investment that has already been made along the Southwest border.

What Have We Spent:

Since the last major overhaul of the U.S. immigration system in 1986, the federal government has spent an estimated \$263 billion on immigration enforcement.¹ As discussions with a new President and Congress start to focus on what immigration enforcement and border security should look like it is important to review how much money has already been spent on these initiatives and what outcomes have been produced.

Immigration enforcement spending (further detailed in Attachment A) largely falls into two issue areas: border security and interior enforcement. Border spending includes staffing and resources needed for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), an agency of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) working at and between United States ports of entry. Interior enforcement is primarily focused on staffing and resources for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), also part of DHS, to apprehend noncitizens in the interior of the country, detention for those undergoing removal proceedings, and the deportation of those ordered removed.

¹ See American Immigration Council, *Giving the Facts a Fighting Chance: Addressing Common Questions on Immigration* (Washington, DC: December 2015), 16, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/addressing-common-questions-immigration>; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Budget-in-Brief*, FY 2017, 17, <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/fy-2017-budget-brief>.

Currently, the number of border and interior enforcement personnel stands at more than 49,000.² The number of U.S. Border Patrol agents nearly doubled from Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 to FY 2016.³ Additionally, the number of ICE agents devoted to its office of Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) nearly tripled from FY 2003 to FY 2016.⁴

What has this spending bought? The United States currently has over 650 miles of fencing along the Southern border, record levels of staff for ICE and CBP, as well as a fleet of drones—among other resources. Some of these resources have been spent on ill-conceived projects, such as the \$1 billion attempt to construct a “virtual fence” along the Southwest border, a project initiated in 2005 that was later scrapped for being ineffective and too costly.⁵

All of these efforts that have accumulated in the name of security, however, do not necessarily measure border security.⁶ It is past time for the United States to focus on metrics that actually assess achievements and progress on security.⁷ DHS lacks transparent, consistent, and stable metrics for evaluating border enforcement. Before deciding how to address border security, Congress should require clear reporting on metrics from DHS.⁸ Such metrics would better allow Congress and the public to hold the immigration agencies accountable and assess whether and what additional resources are needed (or not needed) to secure our border.

What Have We Built And What Do We Need:

For generations, politicians have talked about constructing a border wall. The fact is that (as further detailed in Attachment B) building a fortified and impenetrable wall between the United States and Mexico might make for pithy sound bites, but in reality it is unnecessary, complicated, ineffective, expensive, and would create a host of additional problems.

The Government Accountability Office found that single-layer pedestrian fencing could cost approximately \$6.5 million per mile. In addition, millions would have to be spent on roads and maintenance.⁹ The easiest parts of the border fence have been built, according to Marc Rosenblum, formerly of the Migration Policy Institute and the current DHS Deputy Secretary of

² See American Immigration Council, *Giving the Facts a Fighting Chance: Addressing Common Questions on Immigration* (Washington, DC: December 2015), 18,

<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/addressing-common-questions-immigration>.

³ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Review of the Staffing Analysis Report under the Border Patrol Agent Reform Act of 2014,” May 2016, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/677475.pdf>.

⁴ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Congressional Budget Justification”, FY 2016, <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY%202017%20Congressional%20Budget%20Justification%20-%20Volume%20201.pdf>.

⁵ Julia Preston, “Homeland Security Cancels ‘Virtual Fence’ After \$1 Billion is Spent,” *New York Times*, January 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/15/us/politics/15fence.html>.

⁶ Bipartisan Policy Center, “Measuring the Metrics: Grading the Government on Immigration Enforcement,” February 2015, <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/measuring-the-metrics-grading-the-government-on-immigration-enforcement/>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Government Accountability Office, “Secure Border Initiative Fence Construction Costs,” January 2009, available at, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09244r.pdf>.

the Office of Immigration Statistics.¹⁰ The estimated cost of the remaining border wall segments are between \$15 and \$25 billion, with each mile of fencing costing \$16 million.¹¹

According to the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 DHS budget, \$274 million was spent on border fence maintenance.¹² Based on that expense, one can extrapolate that if fencing is built on the final two-thirds of the Southern border, the maintenance costs will triple to more than \$750 million annually. In FY 2006, appropriations for building and maintaining border infrastructure was \$298 million, and then jumped to \$1.5 billion in FY 2007 to pay for the fencing mandated in the Secure Fence Act.¹³ FY 2016 appropriations were \$447 million.¹⁴

Outgoing Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Gil Kerlikowske said in January 2017, "I think that anyone who's been familiar with the southwest border and the terrain ... kind of recognizes that building a wall along the entire southwest border is probably not going to work," adding that he does not "think it is feasible" or the "smartest way to use taxpayer money on infrastructure."¹⁵

The head of the National Border Patrol Council, a union representing 16,000 Border Patrol agents which endorsed President Trump during his campaign, said, "We do not need a wall along the entire 2,000 miles of border."¹⁶ He went on to say, "If I were to quantify an actual number, I would say that we need about 30 percent. Thirty percent of our border has to have an actual fence [or] wall."¹⁷ The existing 650 miles make up more than 30 percent of the 2,000 mile border.

According to an internal U.S. government study obtained by Reuters in April 2016, CBP believes that more technology is needed along the border to create a "virtual wall." The agency requested better radios and more aerial drones, but only 23 more miles of fences.¹⁸

Border Security is About More than Enforcement:

¹⁰ Kate Drew, "This is What Trump's Border Wall Could Cost," CNBC, available at, <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/10/09/this-is-what-trumps-border-wall-could-cost-us.html>.

¹¹ Id.

¹² Department of Homeland Security, "Fiscal Year 2017 Congressional Budget Justification, Volume 1," February 2016, available at, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY%202017%20Congressional%20Budget%20Justification%20-%20Volume%201_1.pdf.

¹³ Carla Argueta, "Border Security: Immigration Enforcement Between Ports of Entry," Congressional Research Service, April 2016, available at, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/R42138.pdf>.

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ Brian Ross, Brian Epstein, and Paul Blake, "Retiring Border Chief Calls Trump's Wall a Waste of Time, Money," ABC News, January 2017, available at, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trumps-border-wall-waste-time-money-retiring-border/story?id=44978156>.

¹⁶ Morning Edition, Border Patrol Agents' Union Confers with Trump on Securing the Border, National Public Radio, November 2016, available at, <http://www.npr.org/2016/11/17/502402360/border-patrol-agents-union-confers-with-trump-on-securing-the-border>.

¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ Julia Harte, "No Wall, But More High-Tech Gear, Fencing Sought by U.S. Border Agents, Reuters, January 2017, available at, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-fence-exclusive-idUSKCN0XP28J>.

While today’s hearing is focused on enforcement along our southern border, the Immigration Council concerns about the border go far beyond concerns related to further militarization of our nation’s borders. The Immigration Council promotes the development of immigration policies that reflect our proud history as a nation of immigrants that respects fundamental principles of fairness and due process. To that end, our report, [*A Guide to Children Arriving at the Border: Laws, Policies and Responses*](#), provides information about the tens of thousands of children—some traveling with their parents and others alone—who have fled their homes in Central America and arrived at our southern border and why the current enforcement only response to their arrival is the wrong approach.¹⁹ As described in the *Guide*, unaccompanied children and families are still fleeing Central American violence in large numbers. Organized crime, gangs, and violence are driving children, families, women, and men out of their hometowns and countries, a situation detailed in the report, [*Understanding the Central American Refugee Crisis: Why They are Fleeing*](#),²⁰ and the paper, [*No Childhood Here: Why Central American Children Are Fleeing Their Homes*](#).²¹ These arriving children, families, and others from the region have been apprehended, detained in poor conditions, and rushed through removal proceedings with little due process.²² As noted in our report, [*Detained Deceived and Deported: Experiences of Recently Deported Central American Families*](#) many have been deported back to the dangerous circumstances from which they originally fled.²³

Further, CBP and ICE have a serious and longstanding problem with handling the personal belongings of detained migrants in their custody. Too often, some or all of a detainee’s belongings are lost, destroyed, or stolen by the immigration-enforcement agents entrusted with their care. DHS has attempted to correct this problem through two policy changes, however, these policy shifts have yet to bear fruit. As our report, [*Deported with No Possessions: The Mishandling of Migrants’ Personal Belongings by CBP and ICE*](#), shows detainees from Mexico are still just as likely to have their property retained and not returned as they were before DHS implemented the new policies.²⁴ CBP has also been in the spotlight for its questionable practices regarding the treatment of migrants in its holding facilities near the U.S.’ southern border. Each year, hundreds of thousands of individuals are held in these facilities, which are meant to hold

¹⁹ “A Guide to Children Arriving At the Border: Laws, Policies and Responses,” American Immigration Council, June 2015, available at, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/guide-children-arriving-border-laws-policies-and-responses>.

²⁰ Jonathan T. Hiskey, Ph.D., Abby Córdova, Ph.D., Diana Orcés, Ph.D. and Mary Fran Malone, Ph.D., “Understanding the Central American Refugee Crisis: Why They are Fleeing and How U.S. Policies are Failing to Deter Them,” American Immigration Council, February 2016, available at, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/understanding-central-american-refugee-crisis>.

²¹ Elizabeth Kennedy, “No Childhood Here: Why Central American Children are Fleeing Their Homes,” American Immigration Council, July 2014, available at, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/no-childhood-here-why-central-american-children-are-fleeing-their-homes>.

²² *Deplorable Medical Treatment at Family Detention Centers*, American Immigration Council, July 20, 2016, available at, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/news/deplorable-medical-treatment-family-detention-centers>.

²³ Guillermo Cantor, Ph.D. and Tory Johnson, “Detained Deceived, and Deported: Experiences of Recently Deported Central American Families,” American Immigration Council, May 2016, available at, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/special-reports/deported-central-american-families>.

²⁴ Walter Ewing, Ph.D. and Guillermo Cantor, Ph.D., “Deported with No Possessions: The Mishandling of Migrants Personal Belongings by CBP and ICE,” American Immigration Council, December 2016, available at, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/deported-no-posessions>.

individuals for a short time and are not designed for overnight custody, and yet they are routinely used in this way. Government records analyzed in the report, *[Detained Beyond the Limit: Prolonged Confinement by U.S. Customs and Border Protection Along the Southwest Border](#)*, contain information on length of detention for all Border Patrol sectors along the U.S.' southwest border, reveal that individuals are frequently held for days and sometimes even months in such facilities.²⁵ The American Immigration Council hopes that the Committee will not just look at enforcement along our Southern border but look to address these issues as well.

Border security depends on the smart and efficient use of available resources. At the same time, border enforcement cannot and should not be done in isolation. Instead, it must be examined in the larger context of reforms needed for the entire immigration system.

²⁵ Guillermo Cantor, Ph.D., "Detained Beyond the Limit: Prolonged Confinement by U.S. Customs and Border Protection along the Southwest Border," August 2016, available at, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/prolonged-detention-us-customs-border-protection>.

ATTACHMENT A



The Cost of Immigration Enforcement and Border Security

Since the last major overhaul of the U.S. immigration system in 1986, the federal government has spent an estimated [\\$263 billion](#) on immigration enforcement.¹ As discussions with a new President and Congress start to focus on what immigration enforcement and border security should look like it is important to review how much money has already been spent on these initiatives and what outcomes have been produced.

Immigration enforcement spending largely falls into two issue areas: border security and interior enforcement. Border spending includes staffing and resources needed for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), an agency of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) working at and between United States ports of entry. Interior enforcement is primarily focused on staffing and resources for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), also part of DHS, to apprehend noncitizens in the interior of the country, detention for those undergoing removal proceedings, and the deportation of those ordered removed.

Currently, the number of border and interior enforcement personnel stands at more than [49,000](#).² The number of U.S. Border Patrol agents nearly [doubled](#) from Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 to FY 2016.³ Additionally, the number of ICE agents devoted to its office of Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) [nearly tripled](#) from FY 2003 to FY 2016.⁴

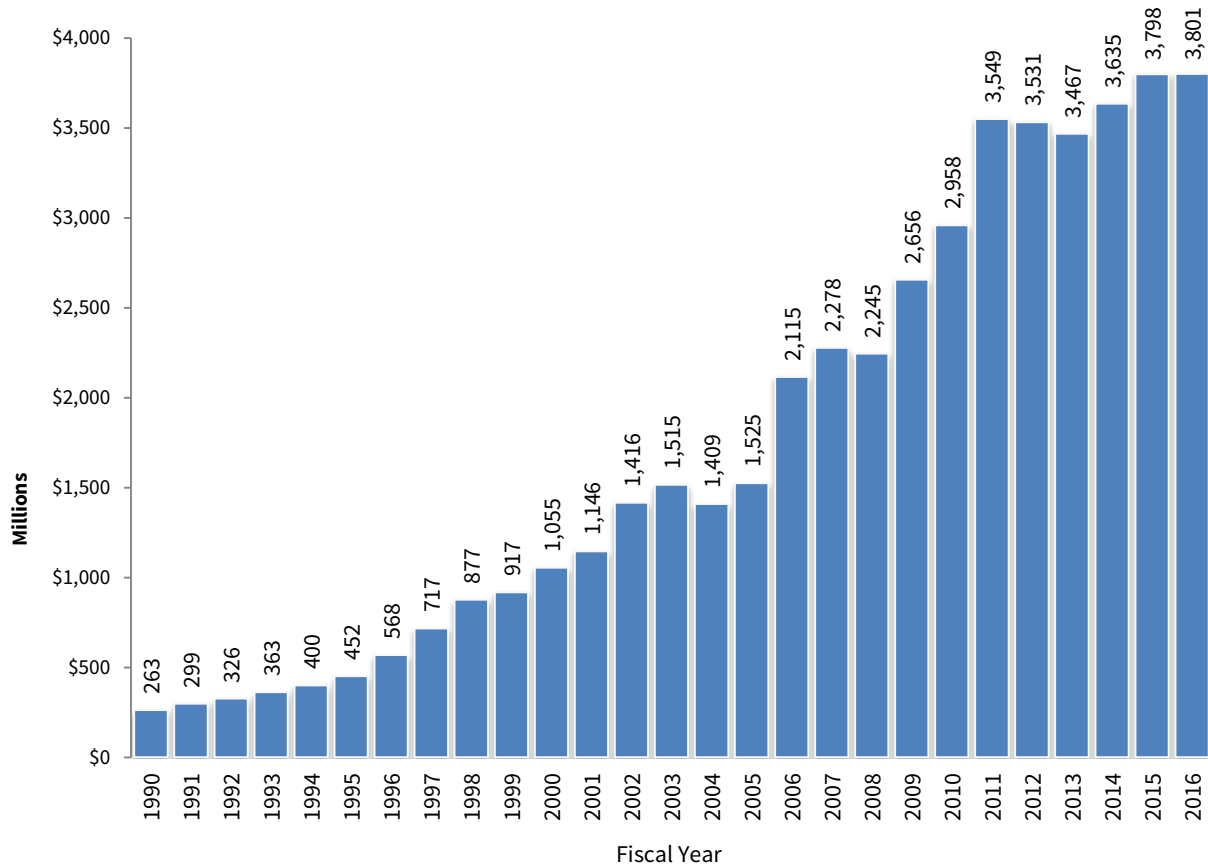
What has this spending bought? The United States currently has over 650 miles of fencing along the Southern border, record levels of staff for ICE and CBP, as well as a fleet of drones—among other resources. Some of these resources have been spent on ill-conceived projects, such as the \$1 billion attempt to construct a “[virtual fence](#)” along the Southwest border, a project initiated in 2005 that was later scrapped for being ineffective and too costly.⁵ Even with record level spending on enforcement, enforcement alone is not sufficient to address the challenges of undocumented migration.⁶ It also has significant unintended consequences, according to U.S. [Border Patrol statistics](#), the Southwest border witnesses approximately one death per day.⁷ All of these efforts that have accumulated in the name of security, however, do not necessarily [measure border security](#).⁸ It is past time for the United States to focus on metrics that actually assess achievements and progress on security.⁹ DHS lacks transparent, consistent, and stable metrics for evaluating border enforcement. Before deciding how to address border security, Congress should require clear reporting on metrics from DHS.¹⁰ Such metrics would better allow Congress and the public to hold the immigration agencies accountable and assess whether and what additional resources are needed (or not needed) to secure our border.

The Cost in Dollars

The immigration enforcement budget has increased massively since the early 1990s, but Congress continues to call for more taxpayer dollars to be spent at the border.

- Since 1993, when the current strategy of concentrated border enforcement was first rolled out along the U.S.-Mexico border, the annual budget of the U.S. Border Patrol has increased more than ten-fold, from \$363 million to more than \$3.8 billion (Figure 1).¹¹

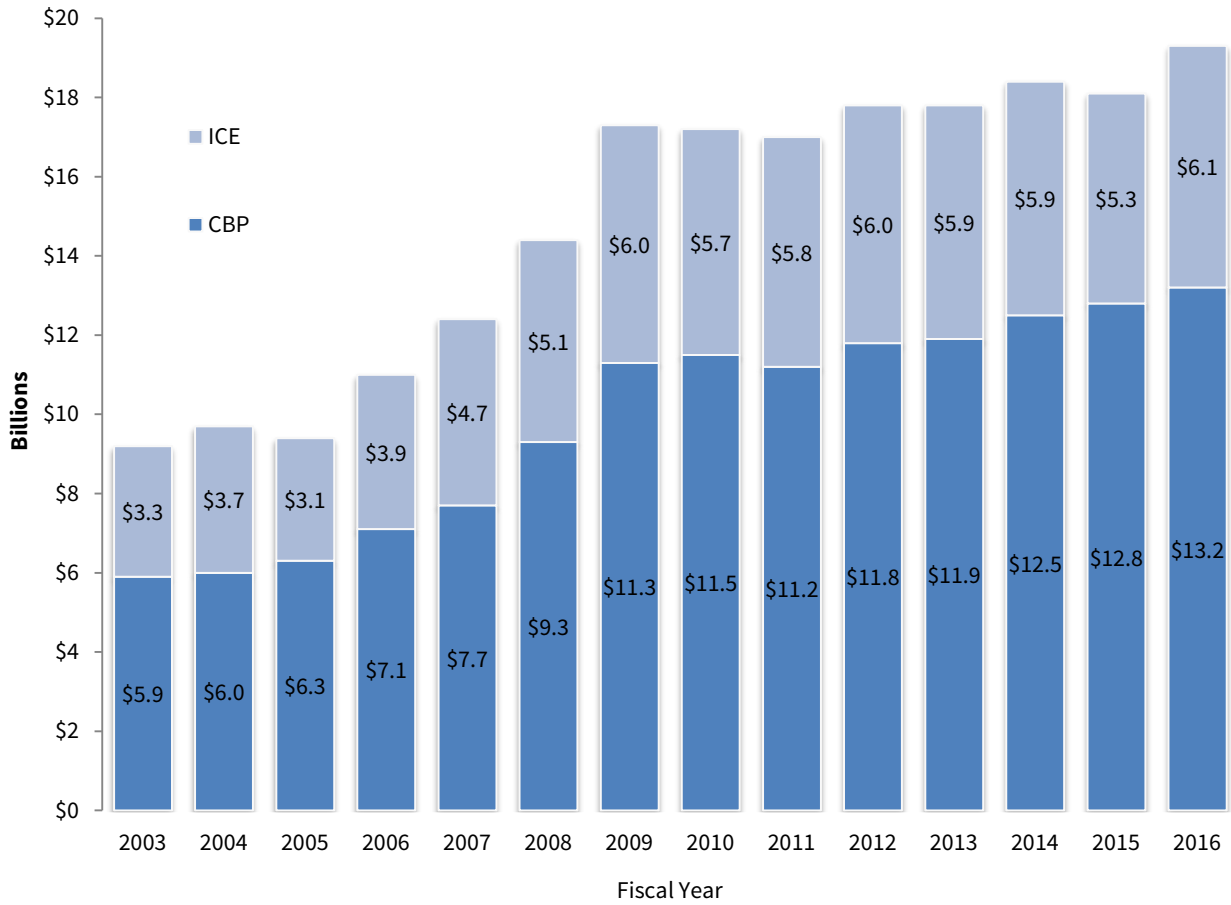
Figure 1: U.S. Border Patrol Budget, FY 1990-2015



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "U.S. Border Patrol Fiscal Year Budget Statistics (FY 1990-FY 2015)," January 12, 2016.

- Since the creation of DHS in 2003, the budget of CBP has more than doubled from \$5.9 billion to \$13.2 billion per year (Figure 2).¹²
- On top of that, ICE spending has grown 85 percent, from \$3.3 billion since its inception to \$6.1 billion today (Figure 2).¹³

Figure 2: CBP & ICE Annual Budgets, FY 2003-2016

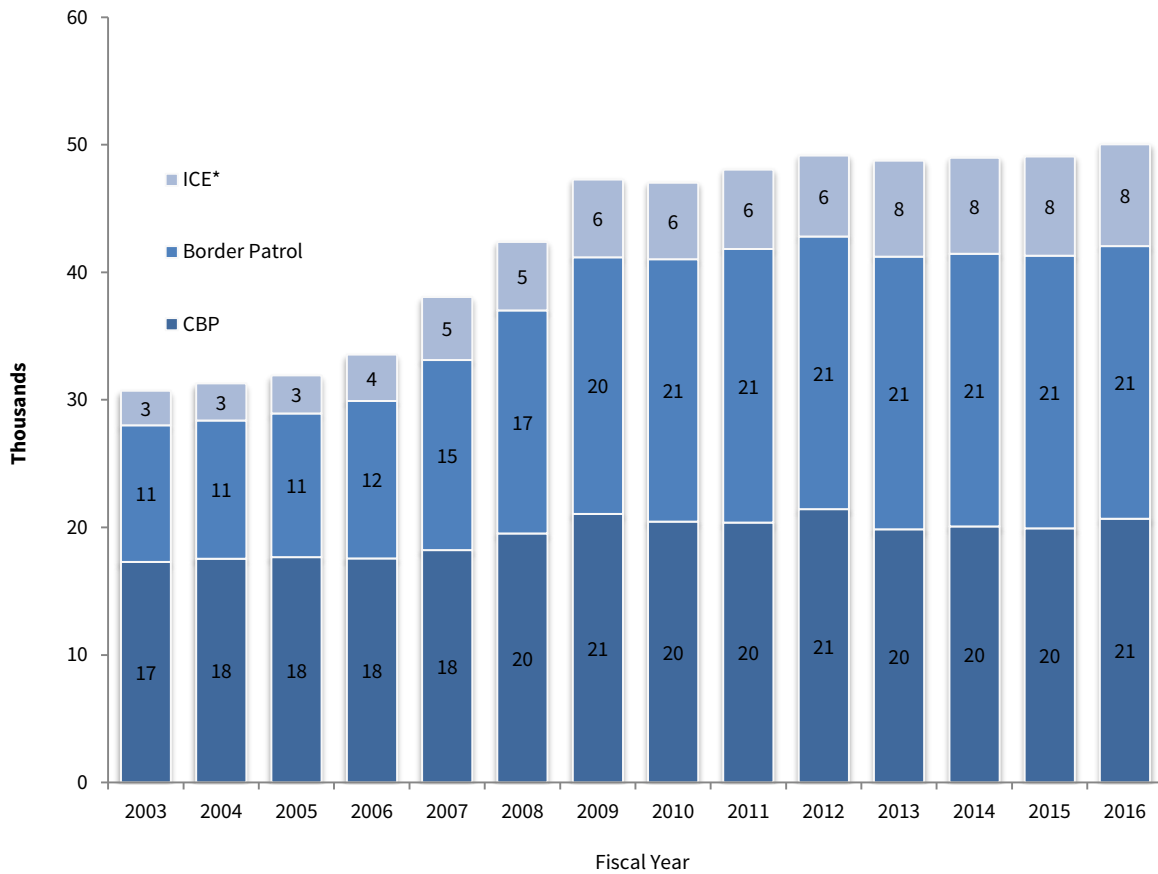


Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Budget-in-Brief, FY 2005-2017.

Increases in Personnel

- Since 1993, the number of U.S. Border Patrol agents nearly doubled from 10,717 to a congressionally mandated 21,370 in FY 2016 (Figure 3).¹⁴
- The number of CBP officers staffing ports of entry (POEs) grew from 17,279 in FY 2003 to 21,423 in FY 2012 (Figure 3).¹⁵
- The number of ICE agents devoted to Enforcement and Removal Operations increased from 2,710 in FY 2003 to 7,995 in FY 2016 (Figure 3).¹⁶

Figure 3: CBP Officers, Border Patrol Agents, and ICE Agents, FY 2003-2016



Source: See endnotes 11, 12, and 13.
* Includes only ERO Officers.

The federal government has already met the border security benchmarks laid down in earlier Senate immigration reform bills.

- As the American Immigration Lawyers Association pointed out in a [January 2013 analysis](#), the “benchmarks” for border security specified in the bipartisan 2006, 2007, and 2010 immigration-reform legislative packages in the Senate have been largely met.¹⁷
- The requirements in those Senate bills for more border enforcement personnel, border fencing, surveillance technology, unmanned aerial vehicles, and detention beds have been fulfilled and in many ways surpassed.¹⁸ As the Homeland Security Advisory Panel noted in 2016, ICE detention rose from the normal 34,000 beds to 41,000—an [all-time high](#).¹⁹

Border security depends on the smart and efficient use of available resources. At the same, border enforcement cannot and should not be done in isolation. Instead, it must be examined in the larger context of reforms needed for the entire immigration system.

Endnotes

1. See American Immigration Council, *Giving the Facts a Fighting Chance: Addressing Common Questions on Immigration* (Washington, DC: December 2015), 16, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/addressing-common-questions-immigration>; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Budget-in-Brief*, FY 2017, 17, <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/fy-2017-budget-brief>.
2. See American Immigration Council, *Giving the Facts a Fighting Chance: Addressing Common Questions on Immigration* (Washington, DC: December 2015), 18, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/addressing-common-questions-immigration>.
3. U.S. Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Review of the Staffing Analysis Report under the Border Patrol Agent Reform Act of 2014," May 2016, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/677475.pdf>.
4. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Congressional Budget Justification", FY 2016, <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY%202017%20Congressional%20Budget%20Justification%20-%20Volume%201.pdf>.
5. Julia Preston, "Homeland Security Cancels 'Virtual Fence' After \$1 Billion is Spent," *New York Times*, January 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/15/us/politics/15fence.html>.
6. Doris Meissner, Donald M. Kerwin, Muzaffar Chishti, and Claire Bergeron, *Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of Formidable Machinery*, Migration Policy Institute, January 2013, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-enforcement-united-states-rise-formidable-machinery>.
7. United States Border Patrol, Southwest Border Sectors, <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2016-Oct/BP%20Southwest%20Border%20Sector%20Deaths%20FY1998%20-%20FY2016.pdf>.
8. Bipartisan Policy Center, "Measuring the Metrics: Grading the Government on Immigration Enforcement," February 2015, <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/measuring-the-metrics-grading-the-government-on-immigration-enforcement/>.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Department Management and Operations, Analysis and Operations, Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Customs and Border Protection," *Congressional Budget Justification FY 2017-Volume I*, 880, [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY 2017 Congressional Budget Justification - Volume 1 1.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY%2017%20Congressional%20Budget%20Justification%20-%20Volume%201%20-%20I.pdf).
12. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Budget-in-Brief*, FY 2005-2017, <https://www.dhs.gov/dhs-budget>.
13. Ibid.
14. U.S. Government Accountability Office, "U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Review of the Staffing Analysis Report under the Border Patrol Agent Reform Act of 2014," May 2016, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/677475.pdf>.
15. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Congressional Budget Justification*, FY 2003 and 2012, <https://www.dhs.gov/dhs-budget>.
16. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Congressional Budget Justification*, FY 2003-2016, <https://www.dhs.gov/dhs-budget>.
17. Greg Chen and Su Kim, *Border Security: Moving Beyond Past Benchmarks* (Washington, DC: American Immigration Lawyers Association, January 2013), <http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?bc=25667|43061>.
18. Ibid.
19. Homeland Security Advisory Council, "Report of the Subcommittee on Privatized Immigration Detention Facilities," *Department of Homeland Security*, December 1, 2016, <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/DHS%20HSAC%20PIDF%20Final%20Report.pdf>; National Immigrant Justice Center, "Immigration Detention Bed Quota Timeline," January 2017, https://immigrantjustice.org/sites/default/files/content-type/commentary-item/documents/2017-01/Immigration%20Detention%20Bed%20Quota%20Timeline%202017_01_05.pdf.

ATTACHMENT B



The High Cost and Diminishing Returns of a Border Wall

For generations, politicians have talked about constructing a border wall. The fact is that building a fortified and impenetrable wall between the United States and Mexico might make for pithy sound bites, but in reality it is unnecessary, complicated, ineffective, expensive, and would create a host of additional problems.

Extensive physical barriers already exist along the U.S.-Mexico border.

- The U.S.-Mexico border is [1,954 miles](#) long. [Border security](#) involves managing the flow of people and goods across the border and preventing the illegal entry of people and goods. The existing border security infrastructure includes physical barriers, aerial surveillance, and technology. More than 21,000 Border Patrol agents—as well as other Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Justice (DOJ) personnel— staff ports of entry, Border Patrol stations, forward operating bases, and checkpoints.
- Current physical barriers along the U.S.-Mexico border include those intended to prevent illegal border crossings by foot (pedestrian fencing) and impede vehicles from smuggling persons or contraband (vehicle fencing). Secondary and tertiary layers of fencing further impede illegal crossings.
- As of early 2017, approximately 650 miles of border fence [already exists](#): 350 miles of primary pedestrian fencing, 300 miles of vehicle fencing, 36 miles of secondary fencing behind the primary fencing, and 14 miles of tertiary pedestrian fencing behind the secondary fence.
- The [existing barriers](#) include tall metal or concrete posts, solid corrugated steel walls, metal fencing, and combinations of these designs.
- In addition to physical barriers, [surveillance tools](#), towers, cameras, motion detectors, thermal imaging sensors, stadium lighting, ground sensors, and drones are part of the vast existing infrastructure aimed at stopping the unauthorized entry of people, drugs, arms, and other illicit items.

Congress acknowledged that additional physical barriers are not necessary.

- [The Secure Fence Act of 2006](#) (Pub.L. 109-367), a law that passed with bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, required the construction of about 850 miles of double-layer fencing along five segments of the border.
- A few years after passage, Congress recognized that 850 miles of additional border fencing was not feasible or necessary. In 2008, the [Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008 amended](#) the 2006 law to

reduce the required mileage of reinforced fencing to “not less than 700 miles of the southwest border where fencing would be most practical and effective” In addition, DHS is not required to install fencing “in a particular location along the international border of the United States if the Secretary determines that the use or placement of such resources is not the most appropriate means to achieve and maintain operational control over the international border at such location.”

- Even Senator Chuck [Grassley](#) (R-IA), a long-time opponent of immigration reform, said in early January 2017, “We’ve already appropriated money for walls. We’ve got walls right now.”

The wall is expensive.

- The Government Accountability Office [found](#) that single-layer pedestrian fencing could cost approximately \$6.5 million per mile. In addition, millions would have to be spent on roads and maintenance.
- The easiest parts of the border fence have been [built](#), according to Marc Rosenblum, formerly of the Migration Policy Institute and the current DHS Deputy Secretary of the Office of Immigration Statistics. The [estimated](#) cost of the remaining border wall segments are between \$15 and \$25 billion, with each mile of fencing costing \$16 million.
- According to the Fiscal Year (FY) [2017 DHS budget](#), \$274 million was spent on border fence maintenance. Based on that expense, one can extrapolate that if fencing is built on the final two-thirds of the Southern border, the maintenance costs will triple to more than \$750 million annually.
- In FY 2006, [appropriations](#) for building and maintaining border infrastructure was \$298 million, and then jumped to \$1.5 billion in FY 2007 to pay for the fencing mandated in the Secure Fence Act. FY 2016 [appropriations](#) were \$447 million.

The federal border agencies have not asked for a wall.

- Outgoing Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Gil Kerlikowske [said](#) in January 2017, “I think that anyone who’s been familiar with the southwest border and the terrain ... kind of recognizes that building a wall along the entire southwest border is probably not going to work,” adding that he does not “think it is feasible” or the “smartest way to use taxpayer money on infrastructure.”
- The head of the National Border Patrol Council, a union representing 16,000 Border Patrol agents which endorsed President Trump during his campaign, [said](#), “We do not need a wall along the entire 2,000 miles of border.” He went on to say, “If I were to quantify an actual number, I would say that we need about 30 percent. Thirty percent of our border has to have an actual fence [or] wall.” The existing 650 miles make up more than 30 percent of the [2,000 mile border](#).

- According to an internal U.S. government [study](#) obtained by Reuters in April 2016, CBP believes that more technology is needed along the border to create a “virtual wall.” The agency requested better radios and more aerial drones, but only 23 more miles of fences.

There are complications to building a wall.

- **Natural barriers.** The [Rio Grande River](#) runs along 1,254 miles of the border between Mexico and the United States and does not flow in a straight line—instead twisting, turning, and flooding regularly. Under the [International Boundary and Water Commission](#), created in 1889 between the U.S. and Mexico, border barriers may not disrupt the flow of the Rio Grande. As a result, the current border fencing in Texas is located miles away from the border on private land owner’s property. In addition, the [mountain range](#) at Otay Mesa in California makes it extremely impractical to construct a wall or fencing.
- **Private land ownership.** After the passage of the Secure Fence Act, the government attempted to seize private property for purposes of constructing border barriers through eminent domain. These efforts led to [protracted legal battles](#) that in some cases lasted seven years. The federal government had to provide monetary compensation to the landowners and agreed to construct several access points along the fence on that property. Some of the existing gaps in the fence are in affluent areas where residents fought construction. It would likely cost the federal government considerable amounts of money to purchase land and build in those areas.
- **Native American land.** The [Tohono O’odam Nation](#) runs along 75 miles of the southwest border, and members of the tribe have already stated they will not allow a border wall to be built on their reservation. A wall would effectively cut the reservation in half and make movement across the border, but within the reservation, difficult. It would separate families and make it difficult for tribe members to care for burial sites located in Mexico. Additionally, federal law requires the federal government to consult with tribal governments before constructing on the land. Without the tribe’s support, the federal government could resort to condemning the land and removing it from the trust of the Tohono O’odam Nation.

The wall would create a host of additional problems.

- **Border deaths.** History has shown that when barriers are erected along the border, people attempt to cross at more remote and dangerous locations. According to U.S. [Border Patrol statistics](#), the southwest border witnesses approximately one death per day. Over the past 18 years, [nearly 7,000 people](#) have died of hypothermia, drowning, heat exhaustion, or dehydration.
- **Harm to wildlife.** The border region is home to many [species](#) and some of the most endangered species, including the Sonoran Pronghorn, the Mexican gray wolf, and the jaguar. If their natural habitat is divided by a large barrier, animals are left with a smaller habitat and may venture outside

their usual ranges, causing potential harm to the animals and people.

- **Damage to the environment.** A wall could impede the natural flow of floodwaters, resulting in damage and erosion, as it did [in 2008](#).