

Physical security barriers helpful in some locations, but border wall resources better directed at ports of entry

Border Trade Alliance urges Congress and administration to ensure ports have adequate staff to boost security and speed legitimate trade, travel

The issue: Physical security barriers have proven helpful in reducing illegal border crossings between the land border ports of entry in some areas of the U.S.-Mexico border. However, constructing a wall the length of the border from San Diego, California to Brownsville, Texas is both impracticable and an imprudent use of resources.

Ensuring CBP has the resources necessary to process cross-border trade and travel efficiently

The U.S. government makes a significant investment in immigration enforcement, totaling \$18 billion across several agencies and programs.¹ Customs and Border Protection, on the other hand, processed over \$2.4 trillion in goods at ports of entry (air, land and sea) in FY 2015. CBP staffing levels, however, have remained relatively flat, straining the agency's ability to keep pace with rising trade flows. Despite congressional authorization for the agency to add an additional 2,000 Customs and Border Protection Officers, CBP is far short of that hiring goal.² Directing finite budget dollars to the construction of a border wall would undercut Congress' stated goals for CBP.

Border wall price tag creates a budget strain while port infrastructure buckles

Senate Majority Leader McConnell indicated in January 2017 that he believes construction of a wall along the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border would require an investment ranging from \$12-\$15 billion.³ Some press accounts, citing Department of Homeland Security sources, put the estimated price closer to \$20 billion.⁴

Meanwhile, CBP estimates that modernizing aging ports of entry – which play an essential role in physical and economic security – will require \$5 billion-\$6 billion in upgrades.



¹ http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/us-spends-immigration-major-federal-criminal-enforcement-combined/story?id=18151143

² <http://www.govexec.com/management/2016/04/one-agency-congress-actually-wants-hire-more-failing-do-so/127615/>

³ <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/10/09/this-is-what-trumps-border-wall-could-cost-us.html>

⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-immigration-wall-exclusive-idUSKBN15O2ZN>



Congress and administration can enhance border security by properly equipping lead border port agency

The President has called for the hiring of 10,000 new Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. ICE is the agency responsible for immigration enforcement within the interior of the country.⁵ The agency does not play a direct role in enhancing commerce. The administration is also seeking to hire an additional 5,000 Border Patrol agents. Border Patrol, like ICE, is an enforcement-only agency and does not play a role processing trade or travel.

CBP, on the other hand, plays a critical interdiction role at the ports of entry, as well as serving as the nation's lead agency for facilitating legitimate trade and travel, which enhances the U.S.' economic health. A 2013 National Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events (CREATE) at USC found that adding 33 customs and border protection officers (1 at each of the selected 33 land and airport locations studied) will potentially lead to an increase in GDP of \$61.8 million and employment gains of 1,053 jobs in the U.S.⁶

The Border Trade Alliance strongly urges the President and Congress to work to craft a budget that meets Congress' previous calls to hire additional CBP officers, and to direct resources to improve port infrastructure, while tempering efforts to construct a border wall.

⁵ <http://money.cnn.com/2017/03/03/news/economy/hiring-immigration-agents-ice/>

⁶ <https://priceschool.usc.edu/usc-create-studies-impact-of-customs-border-protection-inspections-on-us-economy/>