

April 23, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chairman Richard Shelby
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Vice Chairman Patrick Leahy
Committee on Appropriations
Room S- 128 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Oppose Funding for the border wall in FY 2019 Appropriations

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, Leader Pelosi, Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey:

As organizations representing civil rights, faith, wildlife and habitat protection, environmental, indigenous, LGBT, and border communities, we continue to urge you to reject funding for new border wall construction (including funds for bollard fencing, levee wall and the conversion of existing vehicle barriers to border walls) on the U.S.-Mexico border as part of the FY2019 appropriations process.

As you may know, there are already 700 miles of border walls, fencing, and other barriers along the U.S.-Mexico border dividing neighborhoods, blocking wildlife and disrupting the flow of water. These barriers stand as hateful symbols of division in otherwise connected borderland communities. Despite the existence of these disruptive barriers and the negative consequences to the community, Congress appropriated \$1.6 billion for the construction of additional barriers along the U.S.-Mexico border in the FY2018 omnibus appropriation legislation. The Department of Homeland Security Budget for Fiscal Year 2019 requests an additional \$1.6 billion.

While we appreciate that efforts were made to limit the impact of these appropriated funds, particularly in the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the fact remains that funneling more money to construct additional barriers continues to put the safety and well-being of frontline border Latino and indigenous communities in jeopardy, enable the destruction of natural resources, wildlife habitat, and exacerbate the extinction of endangered animal species.

In fact, according to some estimates, over 6,500 acres of Texas refuge tracts, state properties, county parks and private nonprofit nature sites are still targeted for impact by the construction of additional barriers as a result of the funding appropriated by Congress in the last cycle alone.

The frontline border communities of South Texas are disproportionately impacted by these unnecessary actions to militarize the infrastructure of the border at a time when immigrant families are already under threat of deportation and further criminalization. The false narrative of a violent and insecure border region has long been used to justify and advance anti-immigrant, anti-border, pro-criminalization, and anti-environmental legislation that has negative economic and civil rights impacts on border communities.

Our coalition continues to assert that the wall, increased militarization of the southern border, the criminalization of immigrants and the destruction of wildlife habitat are actions that do not improve security of the border region (which continues to be one of the safest regions in the country). To this point, in 2017, Border Patrol recorded the lowest level of unauthorized migration across the southern border on record.¹

As your committees move forward with the FY2019 appropriations process, we urge you to stop enabling any further harm on communities living along the U.S. southern border. Congress should reject any efforts to continue funding additional border wall construction that draws scarce resources away from urgently needed infrastructure – including schools, roads, and health clinics– for structures that are widely opposed by border communities, unnecessary, extremely costly, and that according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) cannot be measured for their “contribution...to border security operations.”²

Limited border security resources would be much more wisely invested in modernizing the infrastructure and technology at our ports of entry, which would improve security, focus on the primary location of contraband trafficking, and facilitate tourism and commerce with our third largest trading partner. It is long past time to put an end to border security measures that waste limited federal resources, inflict harm on border communities, destroy habitat, divert water resources, and harm people and wildlife. Except for vehicle barriers, which create the least impediment to border communities, the natural resources, and the movement of wildlife and water across the border, funding for the addition or conversion of all other current barriers constitutes new border wall and should be rejected.

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¹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection (Dec. 5, 2017). CBP Border Security Report FY 2017, pg. 1.
<https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2017-Dec/cbp-border-security-report-fy2017.pdf>.

² Government Accountability Office (Feb. 2017). Southwest Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Better Assess Fencing’s Contributions to Operations and Provide Guidance for Identifying Capability Gaps. (GAO Publication No. 17-331), pg. 25.
<https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/682838.pdf>.

We hope to count on your support to protect the rights of Native Americans and frontline Latino border communities, prevent private property seizures, and stop the devastating environmental, wildlife, and habitat damage by opposing any funding for new border wall construction (including funds for bollard fencing, levee wall and the conversion of existing vehicle barriers to border walls) on the U.S.-Mexico border as part of the FY2019 appropriations process.

Thank you for your attention. Our millions of members and supporters nationwide are counting on you.

Sincerely,

Alaska Wilderness League
Alianza Americas
American Civil Liberties Union
American GI Forum of the US
American Rivers
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Welfare Institute
Another Gulf is Possible
Azul
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
BorderLinks
Born Free USA
Center for Biological Diversity
Center of Concern
Clean Water Action
Coalicion de Derechos Humanos
Columbus Sanctuary Collective
Community4ImmigrantRights
Defenders of Wildlife
Delaware Ecumenical Council on Children and Families
Earth Ethics, Inc.
Earth in Brackets
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Protection Information Center
Fair Immigration Reform Movement
Fellowship of Reconciliation, Louisville Chapter
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation

Friends of Blackwater
Friends of Miami-Dade Detainees
Friends of the Earth
GAPIMNY—Empowering Queer & Trans Asian Pacific Islanders
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
GreenLatinos
Hip Hop Caucus
Hispanic Federation
Hope Border Institute
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
InterReligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia
Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Priests of the Sacred Heart, US
Province
Kentucky Interfaith Taskforce on Latin America and the Caribbean
Klamath Forest Alliance
Knobs Haven Retreat Center
La Unión del Pueblo Entero
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
League of Conservation Voters
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Loretto Mission Activities Team
Loretto Peace Committee
Loretto Women's Network
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Maryknoll Sisters Eastern Region USA
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Mi Familia Vota
MomsRising
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Justice for Our Neighbors
National Latina/o Psychological Association
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association
National Parks Conservation Association
Native Plant Conservation Campaign
Natural Resources Defense Council
OneAmerica
Organize Florida
Peace Economy Project

Power Shift Network
Presente.org
Rachel's Network
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Western American Province
Scalibrini International Migration Network
Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (SIREN)
Sierra Club
Sisters of Loretto
Sisters of Saint Francis of the Neumann Communities
Sky Island Alliance
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Southern Border Communities Coalition
Southwest Environmental Center
St John's Lafayette Square
St. Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America (IFCLA)
The Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc.
The Wilderness Society
Third Order Society of St. Francis
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Turtle Island Restoration Network
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)
United States Hispanic Leadership Institute
Virginia Young Democrats
Western Watersheds Project
WildEarth Guardians
Wildlands Network
William C. Velasquez Institute