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U.S. Proceeds with Construction of Border Wall Despite Local Opposition

by LADB Staff

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The US government's plan to expand the wall along the US-Mexico border continues to move forward amid increased criticisms from Mexican President Felipe Calderon, governors of border states, a coalition of US mayors along the US-Mexico border, and US environmental advocates. In late September, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said it had reached a goal of completing 70 miles (112 kilometers) of new fencing along stretches of the border in California, Arizona, and New Mexico, nearly doubling the length of barriers along the border to about 145 miles (233 km).

The US Congress has included the construction of hundreds of miles of reinforced fencing in various versions of immigration reform legislation during the past two years (see SourceMex, 2006-01-11, 2006-10-11 and 2007-05-23). Even though Congress has yet to approve comprehensive immigration reform, construction of the wall is proceeding as part of the US effort to boost security along the US-Mexico border.

Until the government started with the expansion of the wall, the only major barriers were located on the California border with Baja California near Tijuana and San Diego. "Fleets of tractor-trailers loaded with fence posts and steel tubing have been crossing remote highways and deserts," said the Los Angeles Times. "Crews of National Guard troops spend hours welding raw materials under tarps.

In some areas, contractors are installing the barriers at a pace of about half a mile per day." US Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said President George W. Bush's administration is committed to erecting the wall. "When we make a commitment, we will carry through on the commitment," Chertoff said at a ceremony to mark the progress of the wall near Douglas, Arizona, in late September.

The border wall continues to have the backing of the US Congress. In early October, the US Senate approved a budget for the US Department of Defense that includes US\$3 billion for security measures along the US-Mexico border, including the wall. The US\$3 billion had already been approved in the budget for the DHS, but Bush has pledged to veto that measure because the total budget exceeds his request by US\$2 billion.

"The border security spending, especially money to construct 700 miles (1,126 km) of fencing to keep illegal immigrants from Mexico from crossing into the United States, is so popular among Republicans that they would vote to override Bush's homeland security veto if necessary to obtain financing for the fence," said The Associated Press.

Opposition strong in Texas

While the Bush government and the US Congress continue to push forward with the wall, opposition is mounting from various fronts. A coalition of business leaders and public officials from communities in Texas along the US-Mexico border has threatened legal action to stop construction of the wall (see SourceMex, 2007-07-11). The group, which includes the mayors of Laredo, Eagle Pass, El Paso, Del Rio, McAllen, and Brownsville, in October issued a resolution pledging to fight the construction of the wall from various fronts.

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