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## **U.S. President Barack Obama Leaves Out Funding To Complete Border Wall In 2010 Budget**

*by LADB Staff*

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In what is primarily a symbolic gesture, US President Barack Obama's 2010 budget proposal eliminates funds for further expansion of the controversial wall along the US-Mexico border. About 670 miles (1,078 km) of the 700 miles (1,126 km) of wall has already been completed or is under construction, so the decision would affect the less than 30 miles (48 km.) that had not been constructed. Still, the plan pleased officials in communities on both sides of the US-Mexico border but drew opposition from hard-line US legislators who warned that US security could be compromised.

Under the Obama budget blueprint, funding would remain in place for roads, lighting, and other infrastructure to support the portions of the wall that have been constructed. "There are additional funds for implementation, [for] some additional roads, some additional tactical infrastructure, [but] in terms of any particular set of additional miles of fence there is nothing specifically identified for any further miles of fence," an official for the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) told reporters. DHS officials said completing the portions of the wall that are under construction is intended to comply with the Secure Fence Act of 2006, under which the Senate originally approved construction of the barrier (SourceMex, October 11, 2006). "We are continuing to finish up the fencing to get us closer to the 670 miles of fence that was previously identified and the agency was building to comply with the Secure Fence Act," said the DHS spokesperson.

The US Customs and Border Protection agency said contractors had completed 322.2 miles (518 km) of the 370 miles (595 km) of planned pedestrian fencing and 302 miles (486 km) of the planned vehicle fencing. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano noted, however, that walls would not be part of the US-Mexico border strategy for the Obama administration, except under very limited circumstances. "In the future, we will consider walls only in conjunction with an integrated system and only in places where they make sense," she said.

There was support among members of Obama's Democratic Party in the US Congress for the plan to halt construction of the barrier. For example, Rep. Gene Green (D-TX) endorsed the decision, saying that walls are only "a small deterrent and not very effective." But Rep. John Culberson (R-TX) told The Dallas Morning News that he was "very disappointed to see more proof that the new administration will not truly secure our borders." Eagle Pass mayor Chad Foster, who leads the Texas Border Coalition (TBC), was gratified with the move. "We've always wanted to stop the fence right where it is," Foster said. The TBC, which brings together local governments and the business community, has led legal action to stop barrier construction (SourceMex, July 11, 2007 and April 23, 2008).

Others also endorsed the move. "President Obama has taken steps to halt construction of the medieval fence on the Mexican border a move that brings to an end a chapter of pointless

environmental devastation in the southern United States," the Tucson Citizen newspaper said in an editorial. "Fences have their place in urban parts of the border, but are useless in isolated areas where smugglers go over, under, and through them with impunity," The editorial noted that the portion of the wall that had been already erected has "divided and irreparably harmed some of the richest biodiversity in the world that lies along both sides of the border." Funding increased for other border projects Obama's budget plan does propose funding for key infrastructure projects along the US-Mexico border, including constructing the Tornillo-Guadalupe Bridge near El Paso, Texas.

In addition, the budget asks Congress for US\$27 billion to strengthen border security and immigration enforcement, including increased funding for technology and for hiring more agents for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency. The administration said its budget targets specific security threats, including those posed by drug cartels. The largest increase is proposed for the Department of Justice's Southwest Border Initiative, which supports sophisticated investigations of drug traffickers and funds programs to halt the flow of smuggled high-caliber weapons into Mexico. This complies with a promise Obama made to Mexican President Felipe Calderon that he would take steps to control the flow of weapons into Mexico (SourceMex, April 01, 2009). Some US legislators welcomed the increased expenditures on US security measures. "It is important that our constituents know that the federal government is doing all in our power to ensure the safety and well-being of those who live along the Rio Grande," said Rep. Salomon Ortiz (D-TX).

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