

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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Opening Statement

Ranking Member Mark DeSaulnier

Subcommittee on National Security

Hearing on the Border Wall

April 27, 2017

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Let me start today by expressing my deep condolences to you Ms. Gibboney and your family, on the tragic murder of your son Ronald Da Silva. The crime committed against him was gruesome and unforgiveable. I thank you for being here today.

Thank you also to Ms. Espinoza for the work that you do supporting and advocating on behalf of families who have suffered these unspeakable tragedies.

And thank you to Mr. Judd, Mr. Camarota, and Mr. Stodder for your testimony and work in securing our border. It is crucial that we take a serious, fact-based look at this issue so that we identify what measures will work, what the benefits would be, and what the cost would be to the taxpayer.

The wall that the President is proposing simply won't work and will divert resources away from areas critical to protecting the health, safety, and security of the American people.

Recently, Oversight Committee Member Will Hurd, who represents a district covering over 800 miles of the border addressed his concerns with the President's plan. He wrote an op-ed in the Washington Post in which he called the wall "the most expensive and least effective way to secure the border." He also wrote:

"True border security demands a flexible, defense-in-depth strategy that includes a mix of personnel, technology and changing tactics, all of which come at a lower price tag than a border wall."

I am in full agreement with my colleague. The proposed wall is incredibly expensive with little, if any, return on the investment. Despite the fact that the President claims the wall would cost \$10 to \$12 billion, most analyses place the number far higher. The Department of Homeland Security conducted an internal study that estimated the border wall would cost nearly \$22 billion in up-front construction costs alone. Other independent and congressional studies have estimates up to \$40 or even \$70 billion. This is all in contrast to the programs the same Administration has

proposed gutting, including those that help everyday Americans and provide returns to the American public.

It is troubling that the President's budget proposes billions toward a wall while slashing critical domestic programs. His proposed budget would cut nearly \$6 billion or 19% of funding for the National Institutes of Health – jeopardizing medical advancements to cure chronic diseases, including cancer.

Additionally, the President's proposed wall will undermine our national security by redirecting funds from programs that actually work to secure our border. This money would instead be pulled from port and airport security, programs that help secure these major points of entry where drugs are much more likely to be trafficked into our borders.

Despite the President's rhetoric, during the Obama administration the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States dropped from 12.2 million in 2007 to 11.1 million in 2014. During that same time, more people became unauthorized to be in the United States simply by overstaying visas than by coming across the U.S. border with Mexico. At least 40% of all individuals in the United States illegally have overstayed their visas, not entered across our southern border.

The President's proposal to build a solid concrete wall across the length of our southern border fails to be either workable or cost-effective. His request for Congress to appropriate billions of dollars is short-sighted, and breaks one of his most fundamental campaign promises: that the American people would not pay a dime for a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Mr. Chairman, we have a short video to play.

When announcing his presidential bid, the President stated:

“I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I'll build them very inexpensively. I will build a great great wall on our southern border and I'll have Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words.”

At a February 2016 campaign rally, the President reiterated: “We will build a great wall along the southern border. And Mexico will pay for that wall. Hundred percent.”

Of course, these are only a few of the countless times the President has over-promised and under-delivered for the American people. Now, less than 100 days into his presidency, he has completely abandoned this promise and changed his tune. Earlier this week, President Trump tweeted Mexico will pay for the wall “eventually” and “in some form.” With his track record, nobody should believe that.

Instead, he is demanding that American families have the burden of finding additional billions of dollars to put into the wall. Until earlier this week he was signaling that he would be willing shut down the government to get the leverage to take this money out of the wallets of hard-working American families.

We have real problems to address in securing our borders, but the President's proposed border wall does nothing to advance our national security. Not only should it not be built, but it absolutely should not be built on the backs of American families.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back the balance of my time.

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