

# **National Hispanic Leadership Agenda**

February 22, 2017

U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Re: NHLA Request for Co-Sponsorship of H.R. 837, *Build Bridges Not Walls Act* and H.R. 739, *This Land Is Our Land Act*

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA), a coalition of 40 leading national Latino nonpartisan civic rights and advocacy organizations, we strongly urge you to co-sponsor bills H.R. 837, *Build Bridges Not Walls Act* and H.R. 739, *This Land Is Our Land Act*. These bills would prohibit the construction of a continuous wall or fence on the nation's southern border and prohibit construction of new border barriers on Federal land, respectively. **NHLA will consider including co-sponsorship of these bills in future NHLA scorecards evaluating congressional support for the Latino community.**

The purpose of these two bills is to halt the implementation of President Trump's executive order to build additional and unnecessary barriers along the U.S.-Mexico border. Since January 25, 2017, the American people have seen the real-life ramifications – domestic and global – of hastily written executive orders. We have seen chaos at international airports across the country, fear and confusion within immigrant communities and threats of de-funding pro-immigrant municipalities. Now, more than ever, it is important that the legislature exercise its fundamental role in our system of checks and balances on behalf of the American people.

The U.S.-Mexico border stretches 1,933 miles and currently has approximately 650 miles of border fences strategically placed to stop the entry of unauthorized people, vehicles, weapons, drugs and other illegal items. In addition, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) – the country's largest federal law enforcement agency – has an extensive surveillance network on the southern border, which includes motion sensors, radar, and thermal imaging. Attempts to further seal off the U.S.-Mexico border would not only be ineffective, but extremely costly to taxpayers. Recent estimates by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security put the cost of the wall at \$21.6 billion over more than three years. [1] President Trump's campaign promise to build a wall on the southern border at no cost to the American people is unpopular and not feasible. [2] The *Build Bridges and Not Walls Act* and *This Land Is Our Land Act* are bills that seek to protect taxpayer funds from being wasted on a futile wall.

Building the more than 1,200 miles of wall along the southern border would not only disrupt border towns, but also hundreds of species of animals that live along the border. The U.S. government has already begun to seek waivers on environmental laws that currently protect specified areas of the border. [3]

## MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Alianza Americas  
American G.I. Forum  
ASPIRA Association  
Avance Inc.  
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network  
Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute  
Farmworker Justice  
Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities  
Hispanic Federation  
Hispanic National Bar Association  
Inter-University Program for Latino Research  
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement  
Latino Justice PRLDEF  
League of United Latin American Citizens  
MANA, A National Latina Organization  
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund  
National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives  
National Association of Hispanic Publications  
NALEO Educational Fund  
National Association of Latino Independent Producers  
National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, Inc.  
National Council of La Raza  
National Hispana Leadership Institute  
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators  
National Hispanic Council on Aging  
National Hispanic Environmental Council  
National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts  
National Hispanic Media Coalition  
National Institute for Latino Policy  
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health  
National Puerto Rican Coalition  
Presente.org  
SER Jobs for Progress National  
Southwest Voter Registration Education Project  
United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
United States Hispanic Leadership Institute  
United States-Mexico Chamber of Commerce  
U.S.- Mexico Foundation

Bulldozing, noise, construction and a permanent fixture along thousands of miles of land would undoubtedly harm wildlife. A solid barrier would permanently interrupt the gene flow of various species of animals and prevent the migration of species such as jaguars, wolves, deer, and frogs that freely move around their habitat. [4] The reality of building this wall is one that entails the disruption of entire ecosystems, habitats and the natural flow of flood waters; costly lawsuits regarding eminent domain; and invading protected Native American Reservations.

President Trump's proposed "wall" is nothing more than an extremely expensive political symbol - one that is meant to create a perception of meaningful action rather than a sincere attempt to address our broken immigration system. Instead of walls, bans and other policies that do nothing to address serious, underlying problems, the focus should be on legislation that will allow undocumented immigrants to obtain immigration status, uphold civil rights and due process, and create a sensible immigration systems for the future.

The potential consequences of further construction along the southern border go beyond its hefty price tag; they include effecting irreversible damage on the environment, further militarization of the border region, impinging on the rights of Native American and other border communities, and sending a dangerous message that America is isolating itself in an era of globalization. With your support, the passage H.R. 837 and H.R. 739 will prevent the construction of an unreasonable and impractical "wall" that the American taxpayer cannot afford.

We appreciate your attention to our concerns. Please contact Laura Esquivel, of Hispanic Federation at [lesquivel@hispanicfederation.org](mailto:lesquivel@hispanicfederation.org), or Virginia Ruiz of Farmworker Justice at [vruiz@farmworkerjustice.org](mailto:vruiz@farmworkerjustice.org) with any questions regarding this letter. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Hector E. Sanchez,  
Chair, National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA)  
Executive Director,  
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA)

[1] Edwards Ainsley, J (2017, Feb. 9). Trump border 'wall' to cost \$21.6 billion, take 3.5 years to build: internal report. Reuters. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-immigration-wall-exclusive-idUSKBN15O2ZN>

[2](2017, Feb. 8) Most American Voters Disagree With Trump On Key Issues, Quinnipiac University National Poll Finds; Keep Climate Protections, Obamacare, But No Wall Quinnipiac University. Retrieved from <https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2428>

[3] Edwards Ainsley, J (2017, Feb. 9). Trump border 'wall' to cost \$21.6 billion, take 3.5 years to build: internal report. Reuters. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-immigration-wall-exclusive-idUSKBN15O2ZN>

[4]Yachnin, Y. (2017, Feb. 2), Border wall would block more than people. Green Wire. Retrieved from <http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/stories/1060049458>