

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4305

August 7, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

RE: Border Barrier Construction in the Big Bend Region of Texas

Dear Secretary Mullin:

Texas has always worked cooperatively with the Department of Homeland Security (“DHS” or “Department”) on border security, and we fully support strong border security measures to stop the flow of illegal aliens, drugs, and potential terrorists into the United States. Under *Operation Lone Star*, Texas stood in the gap and secured the southern border while the Biden Administration chose not to enforce the law and allowed millions of illegal aliens to flow into the country. Thankfully, we finally have a secure southern border with historically low illegal border crossings, and I commend the men and women of your Department who helped achieve that and continue to serve on the frontlines.

Recently a bipartisan group of Texas border sheriffs and county judges, private landowners, and the Big Bend Park advocates have raised significant concerns about DHS’ proposed construction of border barriers in Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park. My constituents believe that the 1,000-foot riverbank cliffs and remote Big Bend terrain offers its own source of deterrence for any illegal migrants crossing into the United States. The dangerous terrain includes steep mountains, deep canyons, and expansive deserts which they believe act as a natural barrier that limits large-scale movements.

Many residents that live and work around the parks are also concerned that a physical wall, which would be accompanied by lighting systems, access roads, and maintenance corridors, would (1) ruin the beauty, landscape, and wildlife of the park, (2) threaten culturally significant Native American sites, (3) disrupt wildlife migration, (4) limit access to the Rio Grande River, and (5) significantly harm the local economy as tourism is a major economic driver for the region.

In February Secretary Kristi Noem signed a Notice of Determination^[1], waiving certain laws to allow for expedited construction of border barriers in the Big Bend region. The Secure Fence Act, as amended,^[2] provides that DHS can use alternatives such as technology, lightening,

^[1] 91 FR 7297.

^[2] Pub. L. 109-367.

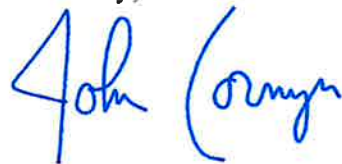
cameras, and sensors to achieve and maintain operational control of the border. In addition, the act requires you assess the most effective, appropriate, and practical measures to deter illegal entries and consult with “the local governments, Indian tribes, and property owners in the United States to minimize the impact on the environment, culture, commerce, and quality of life for the communities and residents located near the sites at which such fencing is to be constructed.”^[3]

In the past such communications between DHS and State and local leaders have occurred, but it appears the level of coordination and communication related to proposed construction in the Big Bend region has not been as fulsome as in prior years. On April 16, fourteen Texas-Mexico Border County Judges wrote to you asking for DHS to engage with the communities they serve and have open communication about the upcoming installation of border security measures. To my knowledge, the county judges have not received a response to their April 16 letter.

The requests from local officials and community leaders for coordination and communication appear very reasonable to me and I would ask that you or your designees meet with Texas stakeholders directly to discuss their concerns before proceeding with any additional construction of physical barriers in Big Bend National Park or Big Bend Ranch State Park.

Working cooperatively with concerned stakeholders and clearly laying out how the proposed construction will impact the region and the assessments the Department made to reach such conclusions would go a long way in allaying some of my constituents’ concerns.

Sincerely,



JOHN CORNYN
United States Senator

^[3] DHS Appropriations Act of 2008, Pub. L. 110-161, Div. E, Title V, section 564 (Dec. 26, 2007).