

ISSUE BRIEF: THE TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION OPPOSES A "BORDER WALL"



Background

The Tohono O'odham have resided in what is now southern and central Arizona and northern Mexico since time immemorial. The Gadsden Purchase of 1853 divided the Tohono O'odham's traditional lands and separated their communities. Today, the Nation's reservation includes 62 miles of international border. The Nation is a federally recognized tribe of 34,000 members, including more than 2,000 residing in Mexico.

Long before there was a border, tribal members traveled back and forth to visit family, participate in cultural and religious events, and many other practices. For these reasons and many others, the Nation has opposed fortified walls on the border for many years.

Border Impacts on the Nation

In 1993, Federal policy tightened border security at U.S. ports of entry, which funneled the flow of undocumented immigrants into the Nation's lands and other remote desert regions.

The Nation continues to face many challenges due to this crisis. For more than a decade, the Nation has spent an average of \$3 million annually on border security and enforcement. The Nation's police force typically spends 60% of its time on border-related issues. Drug cartels have attempted to infiltrate the Nation's communities and recruit tribal members as smugglers. The Nation has been working very hard over many years to address these issues. Building a border wall has never been considered a practical solution.

A Wall is Not the Answer

The Tohono O'odham Nation Legislative Council has passed over twenty resolutions opposing a border wall, most recently reaffirming that the Nation "opposes the construction of a physical wall on its southern boundary" (Feb. 7, 2017). The resolution lays out the many cultural, environmental, and historical reasons for opposing a wall.

However, the most straightforward reason is that a wall simply won't work. The rugged desert environment, which includes mountains with sheer cliffs and washes prone to flash floods, makes a solid wall unworkable in many locations.

Experience shows that undocumented immigrants will simply tunnel under or climb over walls. These techniques are used frequently even in more populated border areas.

Drug smugglers have proven even more inventive at bypassing physical walls. Most recently, Border Patrol agents discovered smugglers had *attached a catapult* to an existing border fence designed to launch drugs across to accomplices on the other side.

The Nation's Existing Border Security Measures

In place of a static, easily bypassed wall, the Nation has taken the lead in partnering with agencies on a comprehensive, flexible and successful approach to border security. Measures include:

- Extensive vehicle barriers constructed 2007-2008
- On-reservation ICE office since 1974
- Two CBP forward Law Enforcement Centers
- CBP highway checkpoints
- TOPD is lead agency in NATIVE HIDTA Task Force
- Infrastructure improvements to roads used by CBP
- Regular town hall meetings with CBP
- Support for full staffing of ICE's Shadow Wolves
- Support for DHS-Nation coordination agreement
- Seeking funding to fill on-reservation radio gaps
- Moving to implement CBP's IFT surveillance system

Due to these efforts, there has been a massive 84% decline in the number of undocumented migrant apprehensions on the Nation's lands in just over a decade. The most significant reduction came with the implementation and completion of the vehicle barrier. Apprehensions nearly dropped in half at that time. (*Exhibit A*)

Moving Forward

The Nation is profoundly affected by the border crisis and the policies that are being developed to address it. The Nation remains committed to protecting its members and the U.S. homeland. The Nation simply wants a seat at the table in developing and implementing border policies that will impact its lands and people.

The track record of the last decade shows that close partnership between the Nation and other agencies is tremendously effective. The Nation hopes to build on this successful record of cooperation in its interactions with the new administration.

The Nation invites the President, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and other leaders to visit, see the unique challenges it faces, and begin a productive conversation on effective border security policies.

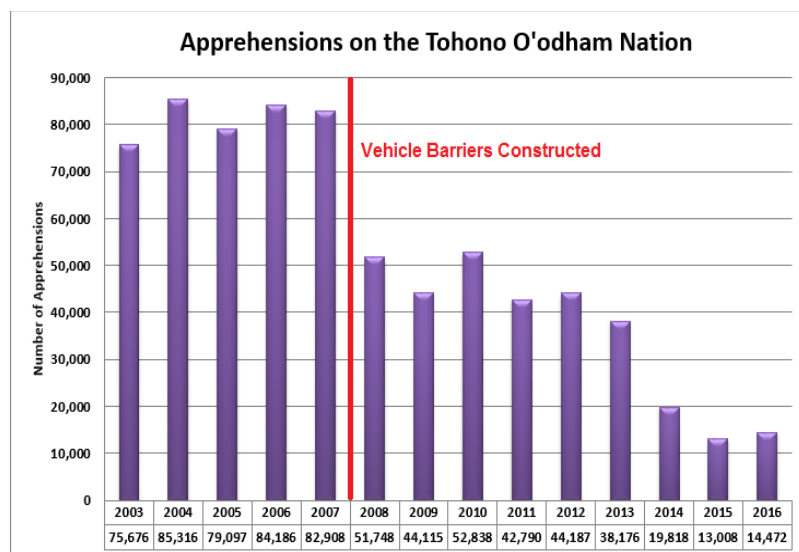


Exhibit A