

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 5, 2018

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Mattis,

Last month the Department of Homeland Security transmitted a request to the Department of Defense to enhance existing border fencing and construct new border infrastructure along 31 miles of the Barry M. Goldwater Range in Arizona. With an estimated cost of \$450 million, we write to express our strong opposition to the use of Department of Defense funds for this purpose and respectfully urge you to deny the Department of Homeland Security's request.

In countless hearings and briefings this year we have heard from senior civilian and military leadership on the readiness challenges our military currently faces. We have heard about the Department of Defense's plans to rebuild military readiness, to include investing in additional spare parts and maintenance, increasing training opportunities, growing certain military occupational specialties, and modernizing aging weapon systems. We have also heard the repeated calls from the Department for stable and predictable funding. With that in mind, we fail to see how diverting \$450 million away from efforts to rebuild military readiness is in the Department or the taxpayers' best interests.

We are also aware of the risk the Department of Defense has taken in new military construction and the significant backlog in sustainment, restoration, and modernization of facilities that support military readiness and quality of life for military personnel and their families. Department of Defense officials testified that the facilities maintenance backlog across the Department amounted to \$116 billion and that 31% of the department's facilities were in poor or failing condition. Funding the requested border infrastructure project may divert resources away from authorized and appropriated military construction projects, deferring critical investments to meet new mission requirements or replacing failing infrastructure.

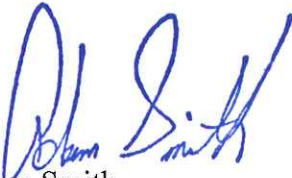
In addition to concerns with the prioritization of these funds, we also have questions about what statutory authority would be used to fund this project. We note that military construction projects that exceed the minor construction threshold require line-item authorization and appropriation by Congress. Congress has not provided an authorization or appropriation for a border infrastructure military construction project and we do not believe the scope or justification for the project warrants the use of emergency construction authorities or consideration outside of the annual authorization and appropriations process.

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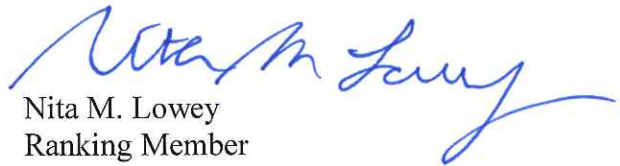
While reform to our immigration system is needed, we do not believe it is a prudent use of taxpayer funds to have the Department of Defense spend approximately \$450 million on 31 miles of border infrastructure. Instead, the Department of Defense should focus its time and resources on infrastructure needs that address the military readiness shortfalls that have been repeatedly highlighted by civilian and military leadership.

We appreciate your consideration of our concerns and look forward to hearing from you on this important topic.

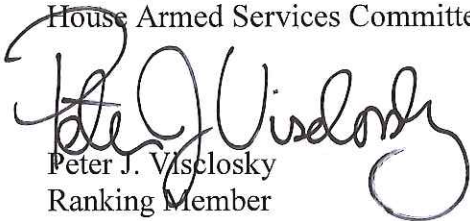
Sincerely,



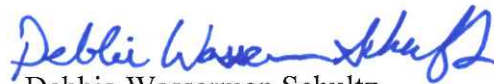
Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee



Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee



Peter J. Visclosky
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Defense



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Military Construction,
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies