



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

February 10, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

As Members of Congress who represent border communities, we welcome your decision to evaluate border security operations before considering whether to finish construction of the border fence. However, we write to ask that you suspend, at least temporarily, construction of the border fence until your evaluation is complete.

We, along with our constituents, understand the importance of protecting our borders. Though there are places where a fence is the most feasible option, we strongly believe the Bush Administration's approach of constructing a fence along much of the Southwest Border was ill conceived as it was void of any meaningful input from the local communities or the Border Patrol Sector Chiefs who are most familiar with the challenges of securing our border. In an era of advanced technologies, the border fence is an antiquated structure that has torn our communities apart and damaged our cross border relationships.

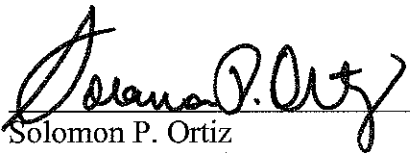
As you may be aware, the previous administration undertook controversial measures to expedite the construction of border fencing, such as the waiver of more than thirty environmental laws. However, despite continually missing deadlines and, at times, forgoing the proper completion of land acquisition transactions, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has moved forward with much haste. In Cameron County, Texas, for example, the DHS issued a commence work order on December 30, 2008, for eight fence segments, none of which had completed the acquisition of the land required.

Furthermore, we would also like to bring to your attention the impact the Bush Administration's approach to the fence had on Indian Country. There are several tribal nations on the US-Mexico Border, during the pushing of the fence these nations were not consulted and in many instances their sovereignty was undermined. Basic protections and rights under the National Historic Preservation Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act were violated. One example was the destruction of 69 Tohono O'odham graves south of Tucson in 2007.

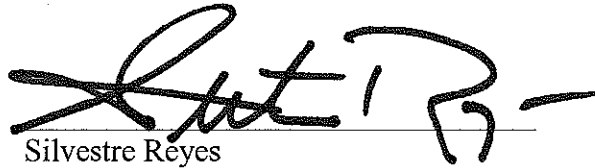
Additionally, the costs associated with construction of border fencing have rapidly escalated. In August 2008 the Government Accountability Office testified that fencing costs averaged \$7.5 million per mile for pedestrian fencing and \$2.8 million per mile for vehicle fencing, up from estimates in February of \$4 million and \$2 million, respectively. Furthermore, a Corps of Engineers study predicted the 25-year life cycle cost of maintaining border fencing would range from \$16.4 million to \$70 million.

Once again, we respectfully request that you suspend construction of border fencing until your Administration has had time to properly review its merits as well as consult with those on the ground most familiar with the situation. We look forward to working with you and Secretary Janet Napolitano to find a balanced and cost-effective approach to ensuring our nation's borders are secure.

Sincerely,



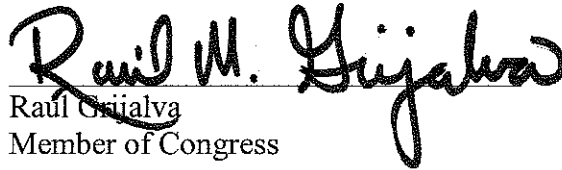
Solomon P. Ortiz
Member of Congress



Silvestre Reyes
Member of Congress



Ruben Hinojosa
Member of Congress



Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress



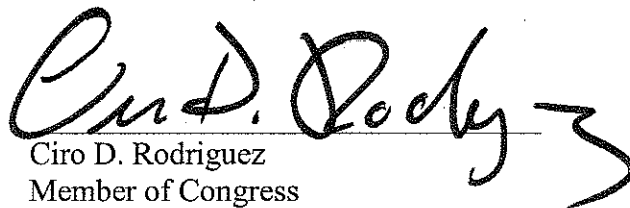
Bob Filner
Member of Congress



Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress



Susan Davis
Member of Congress



Ciro D. Rodriguez
Member of Congress