

Arizona Republicans Push Bill Permitting Private Border Wall Construction

More than a dozen Arizona House Republicans introduced a bill on Thursday that would allow private entities to build walls along the U.S.-Mexico border without obtaining the requisite construction permits.

The proposal follows a June pledge from State Representative Warren Petersen to back a bill benefiting We Build the Wall, a nonprofit that has vowed to spend \$25 million raised through a GoFundMe campaign to construct segments of border wall on private property.

“I will be introducing legislation next session to make sure that @WeBuildtheWall can erect border walls on private property in AZ without impediment from state or local government,” tweeted Petersen, the House Majority Leader. “Their organization is making a real difference with the border crisis! All with private donations.”



Warren Petersen@votewarren

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Petersen did not immediately respond to a phone call, text message, or email asking whether his new bill, HB 2084, is the same proposal he promised in June. A statement from Petersen on Friday did not mention We Build the Wall, but explained that the bill will create a “presumption of permission to build the international boundary wall on state land.”

Founded by prominent anti-immigrant activist Brian Kolfage, We Build the Wall grew out of a campaign to raise \$1 billion to help pay for President Donald Trump’s border wall. After the Democratic takeover of the U.S. House in 2018, Kolfage instead pledged to use any money raised through a viral GoFundMe campaign to build a border wall on private property.

Kolfage tapped prominent right-wing celebrities to serve as advisory board members, including former Trump adviser Steve Bannon, former Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke, Blackwater founder Erik Prince, and Kris Kobach, the former Kansas Secretary of State who helped author Arizona’s SB 1070.

We Build the Wall has already constructed a segment of border fencing on private property in southern New Mexico measuring less than a mile, prompting criticism from local officials who said the organization had not obtained the proper permits. But plans to do the same in Arizona have not come to fruition.

An investigation by *Phoenix New Times* in March found that there is hardly any private land on the Arizona-Mexico border suitable for wall construction. And the

potential locations for privately built border walls come with logistical nightmares. A plot of land where We Build the Wall “negotiated” with landowners to construct fencing happened to contain a 60-foot federal easement and three acre-sized segments owned by three members of the same family who had not yet decided whether they would cooperate with the project.

New Times further reported that We Build the Wall appeared to be using its resources to promote President Trump and urge supporters to vote against Democrats. And the *Daily Beast* reported that Kobach used We Build the Wall’s email list to solicit donations for his failed run for U.S. Senate in Kansas, likely in violation of federal election laws. In August, Florida state officials launched an unspecified criminal investigation of the organization.

Arizona State Representative Diego Rodriguez, a Democrat from Laveen, said in a phone interview that he was troubled that Petersen’s bill “clearly seems to be designed to benefit one particular group.”

Rodriguez added that the bill “undermines local governments and their control of lands in their jurisdictions.”

It does not appear that Petersen has the full Republican caucus on board with his bill, but he does have some supporters. House Republicans co-sponsoring the bill include Nancy Barto, Leo Biasiucci, Frank Carroll, Regina Cobb, David Cook, John Fillmore, Mark Finchem, Travis Grantham, John Kavanagh, Becky Nutt, Kevin Payne, Steve Pierce, Bret Roberts, T.J. Shope, and Jeff Weninger. Republican State Senator Rick Gray is also co-sponsoring the legislation.

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