

Rosendale warns of dire consequences if southern border wall is not completed



Montana Representative Matt Rosendale stands at a portion of the completed border wall on the Arizona/Mexico border. Photo: Congressman Rosendale

Fresh off a week-long tour of security installations along Arizona's border with Mexico, Montana congressman Matt Rosendale blasted the Biden administration's actions halting construction of former President Donald Trump's southern border wall.

"The first thing that became extremely clear was the policies of the Biden administration are already, right now, having impact and not in a positive way," Rosendale said. "It's compromising our national security, it's hurting the economy. There's just a whole host of problems that are already beginning to show up."

Last week's journey to the Arizona desert was Rosendale's first congressional trip as the newly elected Representative for Montana. He was joined by eight additional Republican House members including Arizona congressman Andy Biggs, co-chair of the Border Security Caucus, who organized the event.

"If the Biden administration persists with its open-borders policies, the United States will be overrun with a historic surge of illegal aliens, who are chasing amnesty and sanctuary from the rule of law," Biggs said in a news release on Monday.. "I hope this administration will stop pandering to the radical left when it comes to securing our border and enforcing our laws."

Building a wall on the U.S border with Mexico was one of former President Trump's most divisive campaign promises. Supporters assert that a physical barrier is necessary to bolster national security and halt the flow of undocumented immigrants and illegal drugs into the United States.

While a majority of Americans favor increased security at the southern border, many argue that building a 1,954-mile-long wall would be enormously expensive, would trample on private property rights, cause vast ecological damage, and would ultimately prove ineffective in halting illegal traffic into the United States.



Montana Representative Matt Rosendale walks with a U.S. Border Patrol agent at a port of entry on the Arizona/Mexico border. Photo: U.S. Representative Matt

Thus far about 475-miles of wall has been completed along the southern border, the majority replacing pre-existing barriers with 30-foot tall, steel bollard fencing. A recent story in the Arizona Republic newspaper reports that construction includes new roads, lighting, and sensors to help agents better patrol areas at a cost of roughly \$24.4 million per mile to U.S. taxpayers.

On his first day in office, President Joe Biden signed an executive order halting construction on the wall and redirecting funds that had been set aside for its construction.

Rosendale said that during his four-da-long trip to the Arizona border he spoke with Border Patrol agents, members of local law enforcement, customs officials, and government contractors about the construction shutdown, and warned that dire consequences were already apparent.

“Right now, with construction shut down, there is a hole in this barrier 150 miles wide, from Sasabe, Arizona to Yuma, and there are people putting together caravans right now that are starting to come north because they hear that the new administration’s policies are going to be a lot more lax on illegal immigration. Thousands and thousands and thousand of people,” Rosendale said.

“They’ve already, since the election seen a 15% increase in illegal crossings,” he added. “Only 30% of the detainees are from Mexico. We also have folks that are coming in that they are detaining from Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, India. This is a really, really big problem for our national security.”



President Joe Biden signs his first executive orders in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington. Six of Biden's 17 first-day executive orders dealt with immigration, such as halting work on a border wall in Mexico and lifting a travel ban on people from several predominantly Muslim countries. Photo: Evan Vucci, AP

A 2019 report by the Associated Press shows that nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of all detainees at the southern border come from just four countries; Guatemala (21%), Mexico (19%), El Salvador (18%) and Honduras (16%). Additionally, the number of southwest border detentions has tripled during Trump's four years in office as tens of thousands have headed north hoping to enter the U.S. before the crossing becomes more tenuous and escape from the poverty and violence of their home countries.

About 10.5 million people currently reside in the U.S. illegally according to a 2017 report from the Pew Research Center. Of these, roughly 40% did not cross into the United States illegally, but simply remained after their legally issued student or work visas expired, that according to a recent article in The New York Times.

“More than 60 percent have resided in the country for more than a decade, and they have more than four million U.S.-born children,” the Times article reads. “They account for 5 percent of the work force, representing the backbone of the agriculture, construction and hospitality sectors.”

The American Immigration Council reports that fewer than 5,000 undocumented immigrants currently reside in Montana, constituting less than ½ of 1% of the state’s total population.

Rosendale emphasized the increase in illegal drug seizures documented at border crossings at the Arizona border in the past year.

“There was 1,300 pounds of heroin that got across that border last year,” he said. “There were 8,600 pounds of meth that came across that border last year. There was 3½ million tabs of fentanyl that came across that border last year, and these guys are talking about increases. When those increases take place they don’t just land in Arizona. When the border becomes that porous every town across this country has the potential to become a border town.”

As security measures along the southern border have become more stringent, undocumented immigrants have increasingly been willing to risk crossings at more remote and hazardous locations.



File – In this June 23, 2020, file photo, President Donald Trump tours a section of the border wall in San Luis, Ariz. President Donald Trump is expected to travel to the U.S. Mexico border on Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2021 to highlight his administration’s work on the border wall, the White House said Saturday, (AP Photo/Evan Vucci, File) – Evan Vucci, AP

“Children, infants and the elderly attempt to cross,” a story from the C/NET news website reports. “The conditions are extreme and some people will go for days without food or water. According to the Human Rights National Commission of Mexico and the American Civil Liberties Union, almost 5,000 people died attempting to cross the border between 1994 and 2007.”

Rosendale cited these humanitarian costs as an added motivation for his support for continuing border wall construction.

“They’re being sexually molested, they’re being physically abused, they’re forcing these women into prostitution, they’re taking those children and abusing them and forcing them to carry drugs across the border,” he said of the human smugglers paid to transport illegal immigrants into the U.S.

“If they in fact survive that area between the crossing and when they finally get picked up – which could be anywhere from 10 miles to 60-miles traversing some very bad country – if they’re not killed by the severe exposure of the elements, then many of these folks are forced into servitude to pay off that debt – and if they’re not paying that debt off then guess what, they’ve got family members back in Nicaragua or El Salvador or Mexico that are at incredible risk. Anyone who walks around this country and thinks we’re helping these folks – we are not helping people when we expose them to that kind of treatment.”

According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the current price migrants pay to get themselves smuggled from Central America ranges between \$5000 and \$12,000. Mexican drug cartels control routes along the Mexican portion of the journey, and are known to charge fees to smugglers and migrants who use them. The cartels are also known to kidnap and kill smugglers and migrants who fail to pay these fees.

Rosendale also highlighted the economic impact a cancellation of government contracts would have on local economies.

“When you see millions of dollars worth of heavy equipment; excavators and bulldozers parked on the lay-down yards, and the materials that they were actually constructing the wall with setting there on the side – it is very, very troubling,” he said. “In talking to the contractors they say, look, we’ve got about a 60-day window here where ... we would be able to commence work again if we were able to get some authority and direction, but after 60 days, then people start pulling out.”

The Arizona Republic estimates the Trump administration secured about \$16.3 billion for border wall construction, based upon congressional appropriations, reprogramming notices and contract award data. Of that, perhaps \$8 billion has already been spent.

In 2017 the Washington Post estimated that completing the wall would take three and a half years and cost roughly \$25 billion – enough to hire 50,000 teachers for 10 years.



President Donald Trump tours a section of the U.S.-Mexico border wall under construction Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2021 in Alamo, Texas. Photo: Alex Brandon, AP

In early January the Acting Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection, Mark Morgan, criticized any effort to stop construction, claiming it would cost taxpayers even more money to cancel the contracts.

“If the Biden team implements the immigration policies that they have campaigned on, that they promised the American people on Day One, they will create an unmitigated crisis in the first few weeks,” he said in a telephone interview with reporters.

However, contracting experts quoted by the Arizona Republic said Biden will have various legal options to stop construction, including the termination for convenience clauses built into federal contracts that allows the government to cancel them any time and provide adequate compensation to contractors.

“There is an established regulatory process to stop these contracts, if the president should so decide, in an efficient and orderly manner that will also fairly compensate the contractors for the work that has been performed,” said John

Horan, a professor on government procurement law at Georgetown University Law Center.

In the final months before Biden assumed the presidency, contractors along the Arizona border proceeded at a break-neck pace, completing approximately 1.5 miles of construction a day with limited expectation that the project would ultimately be completed.

“Every single day, the Department of Homeland Security continues to dynamite, to blow up these rugged mountains in order to clear a path for a wall that, in all likelihood, will never be built,” Laiken Jordahl from the Center for Biological Diversity told National Public Radio in November, 2020 “It’s just destruction for destruction’s sake.”

Most environmental organizations oppose the wall’s construction, which has already cut paths across the Coronado National Memorial and Guadalupe Canyon, a wildlife corridor for Mexican gray wolves and endangered jaguars.

Environmentalists claim that existing walls have already blocked off or divided the habitats of several rare animals, including the jaguar, ocelot, mountain lions, desert big horn sheep, and low-flying pygmy owls.



Montana Representative Matt Rosendale speaks with a contractor near the Arizona/Mexico border. Photo: U.S. Representative Matt Rosendale

However, Rosendale continues to emphasize the importance of seeing the project through to some form of completion.

“We have to continue this construction,” he said. “We have to continue to raise the awareness and work with the administration to help them see the errors in his ways.”

Montana’s lone congressman in the House of Representatives said he his working on several pieces of legislation “to help sort out some of this immigration issue and stem some of these problems.”

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