



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on July 19, 2017

## Homeland Security Tasks Army Corps of Engineers to Test Types of Border Walls

David Lapan, a spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), told members of the press on July 18 that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is now conducting tests in the Southwest to determine the best type of border wall to be built along each section of the U.S.-Mexican border.



A report in the *New York Times* noted that Lapan told reporters that USACE technicians are conducting the tests in Santa Teresa, New Mexico; San Diego, California; and in the Rio Grande Valley. Testing in El Paso, Texas and Calexico, California has been completed.

The *Times* reported that Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the parent agency of the Border Patrol, is continuing to evaluate dozens of proposals that have been submitted by vendors for designs for the border wall. Lapan offered no updates on the status of that process but said that CBP is still reviewing detailed proposals submitted by the finalists in the selection process and that DHS still hopes to begin construction this summer.

*Breitbart Texas* reported in May that President Trump's 2018 budget included a proposal for funding the construction of 32 miles of a new border wall, and 28 miles of a new levee wall for the Rio Grande Valley Sector of the border. The report quoted Budget Director Mick Mulvaney, who said, "We are absolutely dead serious about the wall, "calling it one of Trump's "top three" budget priorities.

An article in the *Washington Post* on June 27 cited statements made by Ronald Vitiello, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's acting deputy commissioner, that his agency plans to select four to eight firms in the coming weeks to build the prototypes for the president's much-discussed border wall. The *Post* reported that the prototypes — including a reinforced concrete barrier wall and another made of an alternative material with see-through capability — will be built in San Diego.

Lapan also spoke of something mentioned by Trump to members of the press aboard Air Force One on July 13 — a see-through border wall.

"The professionals on the border obviously prefer something that they can see through in some manner, whether it's, again, a bollard fence that you can see through directly, whether it's cameras that allow you to see on to the other side, whether it's any opening that allows you to see the other side but is not an opening that would allow people to come through or things that would come through," Lapan said.

As the DHS and its subsidiary agencies prepare to build a wall, Congress has started working on funding it. The House Appropriations Committee approved a spending bill on July 18 that included \$1.6 billion to fund 74 miles of fencing along the southwest border.



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DHS has transferred \$20 million from other programs to pay for the construction of several border wall prototypes.

During his discussion with reporters aboard Air Force One, Trump indicated that he no longer saw the need for a continuous wall along the 2,000-mile southern border, as he said during last year's presidential campaign. He said, "You don't need that" given the natural barriers of mountains and rivers.

Trump explained: "You have mountains. You have some rivers that are violent and vicious. You have some areas that are so far away that you don't really have people crossing," he added. "But you'll need anywhere from 700 to 900 miles."

As we noted in [our article on July 17](#), another idea Trump floated during his July 13 meeting with reporters aboard Air Force One was attaching solar panels to the border wall to generate electricity that might be sold to offset the cost of the wall. However, a close examination of the facts associated with this idea indicates that Trump had evidently not examined it closely with experts on solar power generation. In our article, we quoted from a *Business Insider* article that cited figures from an Oregon-based solar installation firm called Elemental Energy. The firm's co-owner optimistically estimated that solar panels mounted on the border wall might generate enough energy to bring in revenue of \$106 million per year, which would be a drop in the pocket compared to the total cost of the wall. The *Business Insider* article estimated that the cost of installing an array of solar panels to bring in that \$106 million a year would total \$4.2 billion. Furthermore, noted the article, "That cost also does not take into account the price of the wall's construction and maintenance, which other analysts have estimated could reach anywhere from \$10 billion to \$2 trillion."

At that rate, observed the owner of Elemental Energy, it would take decades for a solar-powered barrier to pay for itself.

Our article further cited statistics from a [2010 article](#) in *The New American* by energy expert Ed Hiserodt indicating that generating electricity by means of solar power was simply not cost efficient. Hiserodt wrote: "A 100 MW solar power plant (one-tenth the capacity of a typical nuclear plant) using mirrors that are 10-feet 'tall' would then require 100,000 linear feet of parabolic trough — just shy of 19 miles."

Because solar power generation is not economically feasible, its advocates have sought government subsidies for their projects. It is to be hoped that Trump will investigate this scheme further before committing U.S. tax dollars to it.

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