

PRESIDENT SIGNS "SECURE FENCE ACT OF 2006"



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President Bush signed into law the "Secure Fence Act of 2006". This new law directs the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security "to achieve and maintain operational control over the entire international land and maritime borders of the United States" through the use of additional technology (satellites, radar, cameras, etc.) and physical infrastructure improvements (such as additional checkpoints and vehicle barriers. This is supposed to happen within the next 18 months.

Additionally, the law calls for the construction of approximately 700 miles of additional fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border (which is approximately 2100 miles long). The fencing is supposed to be completed by December 31, 2008.

The "Secure Fence Act of 2006" was passed by Congress in early October, but was not delivered to the President for his signature until October 26, 2006. The delay was motivated by political reasons. The Republican leadership in the House of Representatives wanted the bill to be signed into law as close to the November elections as possible and in a very public ceremony by the President so that it would receive maximum press coverage. Many Republicans in Congress pushed for this new law in an attempt to show voters that they were serious about fixing the illegal immigration problem.

Critics of the new law point to the fact that Congress has not appropriated enough money to fund the construction of the entire fence. According to the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), the total estimated cost for the fence has been estimated at \$7 billion. However, Congress recently passed legislation which set aside only \$1.18 billion for the project. According to AILA, this funding would only cover approximately 90 miles of the fence. Therefore, it is quite possible that the fence will not be constructed in its entirety due to lack of funding. Additionally, while the new fence (if constructed) would make it more difficult for illegal immigrants to enter the United States, it does nothing to fix the underlying causes of illegal immigration – the desire of immigrants to come to the United States to find work and to fill jobs for which U.S. employers cannot find enough qualified U.S. workers. Earlier legislation in Congress which would have addressed this situation stalled. In place of that legislation, Congress passed the "Secure Fence Act of 2006".

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