

Week after week, I hear from frustrated constituents wanting to know when the border fence will finally be built. The answer is that construction has so far proceeded far too slowly and recently more obstacles have been placed in the way.

To secure our borders, I was proud to co-author the Secure Fence Act which requires the Department of Homeland Security to construct over 700 miles of double-layered reinforced border fencing as well as installing additional physical barriers, roads, lighting, cameras, and sensors. This important legislation was signed into law on October 26, 2006.

To date, however, the Department of Homeland Security has constructed only 156 miles of pedestrian fencing along our Southern border. By the end of this calendar year, that amount is expected to increase to 370 miles of pedestrian fencing. If some in Congress have their way, construction of the fence will come to a screeching halt.

Through language inserted in a comprehensive year-end spending bill, construction will now be subject to a number of burdensome restrictions. In particular, the bill guts the Secure Fence Act by eliminating the requirement for double-layered fencing and mandating burdensome consultation with border communities. Not a single mile of additional fencing can be built until the Department of Homeland Security consults with other agencies and local communities to reduce adverse impacts on everything from the environment and local culture to commerce and the quality of life. These undue restrictions are simply unacceptable.

Congress has not only authorized the Department of Homeland Security to construct a fence, we have mandated that they do so. In addition, we have provided the funding necessary to start construction as soon as possible.

While some have suggested that the border security fence will never be fully built, my colleagues and I will continue pushing to make it a reality. Just weeks ago, I joined seventy other Members of Congress in urging Speaker Pelosi to make construction of the fence a top priority during the coming year.

Already, the United States has an illegal alien population of more than 12 million people. Without prompt action, that number stands to grow still further, increasing the strain on our hospitals, labor markets, and classrooms. Add in the threat that a porous border poses to our national security and the time to act is now. Southern California, already heavily burdened by illegal immigration, cannot wait any longer.

GARY G. MILLER  
Member of Congress