



Border Security for America Act of 2017: Bill Summary

On July 28, 2017, Rep. Michael McCaul (R - Texas) introduced the Border Security for America Act of 2017 ([H.R. 3548](#)) in the U.S. House of Representatives with [44 Republican co-sponsors](#). The bill expands border security in the United States through the construction of physical barriers along the southern border, investment in border technology and ports of entry, and expansion of the number of Border Patrol agents and Office of Field Operations (OFO) officers in the country. This document provides a summary and analysis of the bill's main provisions.

Key Provisions of the Bill (Between Ports of Entry)

1. **Build Physical Barriers and Deploy Technology Along the Border.** The bill directs the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to build physical barriers between ports of entry, including fencing, a border wall system and/or levee walls, and deploy modern technology where appropriate to achieve so-called operational control and situational awareness of the southern border by January 20, 2021.

Analysis: The U.S. has [built](#) border fencing along 653 miles of the southern border. The cost of building a wall along all 2,000 miles of the southern border is [expected to range](#) from \$21.6 billion to \$31.2 billion, not including the cost of maintaining the wall and other physical barriers over the years. Congress should provide funding to build a fence in the southern border only where it is the most appropriate solution and prioritize the use of modern technology to build a virtual fence in areas on the southern border where building a physical barrier is not practical.

2. **Hire 5,000 Border Patrol Agents.** The bill requires the Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to hire an additional 5,000 Border Patrol agents, increasing the Border Patrol's required active duty presence to 26,370 agents.

Analysis: We must carefully examine whether spending money to hire and station more Border Patrol agents is the most effective investment to secure our borders. The number of Border Patrol agents [nearly doubled](#) between FY 2004 and FY 2014 (increasing from 10,819 to 19,828) and the Border Patrol's budget increased from about \$1 billion in FY 2000 to almost \$3.6 billion in FY 2016, or about 245 percent. Meanwhile, the average annual number of apprehensions for each Border Patrol agent dropped from 182 in FY 2000 to just less than 21 in FY 2016 – or on average less than 2 apprehensions per month per Border Patrol agent. The amount spent per apprehension at the border rose almost 1,475 percent, from roughly \$588 per migrant in FY 2000 to \$8,675 in FY 2016.

3. **Authorize the Use of the National Guard.** The bill permits the DHS Secretary or the Governor of a State to order units of the National Guard to assist CBP in securing the border. The responsibilities would include constructing reinforced fencing or other barriers along the border, constructing checkpoints and conducting surveillance, among other activities.

Analysis: Deploying National Guard units to the border is a questionable use of resources because border crossings have dipped to record low levels. From 2000 to 2016, apprehensions of undocumented immigrants crossing the border [dipped](#) from 1.7 million to about 415,000.

- 4. Eradicate Carrizo Cane and Salt Cedar Along the Rio Grande.** The bill directs the DHS Secretary to remove the Carrizo Cane and Salt Cedar plants along the Rio Grande before January 20, 2021.

Analysis: Eradicating the invasive and nonnative Carrizo Cane and Salt Cedar plants along the Rio Grande River in Texas would [provide](#) the Border Patrol with greater visibility and access to the Rio Grande. These plants, which cover between 30,000 and 60,000 acres, must be removed from the riverbanks. Providing Border Patrol agents with greater access and visibility by removing these plants is an effective policy that improves border management in areas where building a fence or other physical barriers are not practical.

Key Provisions of the Bill (Ports of Entry)

- 1. Improve Port of Entry Infrastructure.** The bill authorizes the DHS Secretary to construct new ports of entry along the southern and northern borders, expand inspection lanes at the top ten highest-volume ports of entry at the southern border by September 30, 2021, and authorizes \$4 billion over four years – or \$1 billion each year between FY 2018 to FY 2021 – to fund these improvements.

Analysis: Investing in infrastructure at our ports of entry is important to keep pace with increasing demand and security requirements. The revenue gained from trade at the border generates jobs for Americans – in fact, nearly six million American jobs [depend directly on trade](#) with Mexico. Yet, wait times to cross the border are often long, regularly reaching up to an hour, which can detract from commerce and lead to billions of dollars in spoiled goods and opportunity cost for American businesses.

- 2. Hire an Additional 4,000 Ports of Entry Officers.** The bill requires the CBP Commissioner to hire an additional 4,000 ports of entry officers, increasing the OFO required active duty presence to 27,725 officers.

Analysis: Adding officers at ports of entry will help our economy. Through FY 2014, CBP OFO [identified a shortage](#) of 3,811 OFO officers to effectively manage ports of entry (CBP OFO currently has 1,046 unfilled officer positions and needs additional officers on top of today's required active duty presence to effectively operate ports of entry). The magnitude of the shortage is amplified by the fact that [adding a single CBP OFO officer](#) to a port of entry would result in annual benefits of a \$2 million increase in our country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), \$640,000 saved in opportunity costs, and 33 jobs added to the economy.

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To read a complete section-by-section summary of the Border Security for America Act, please [click here](#).