

- Mark your confusion.
- Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)
- Write a 250+ word response to the article.

(If you are a teacher or student who would like to modify this Google Doc, go to File > Make a Copy. I cannot and do not respond to Share requests -- my apologies!)

What will become of Trump's border wall?

By *The Week* staff, December 13, 2020

In its final weeks, the administration is rushing to complete more of its signature border barriers. How much got built? Here's everything you need to know:

How long is the wall today?

President Trump inherited 654 miles of border structure along America's 1,900-mile border with Mexico. Over four years, he's constructed 415 miles, although of that total, only about 25 miles cover areas that had no previous barriers. The rest replaced or reinforced existing structures. In the most heavily fortified places, the barrier consists of two walls of concrete and steel bollards up to 30 feet high separated by a paved road. In recent months, the pace of work has surged. Right now, 11 private contractors under the auspices of the Army Corps of Engineers are working around the clock to add at least 50 miles of wall in California, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona before Trump leaves office. To maintain the pace, the administration has waived dozens of regulations regarding endangered species and Native American burial sites. Portions of once protected saguaro cactus forests have been cleared, and communities' access to the Rio Grande and canals has been cut off. In Arizona's Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, crews were blasting in a mountainous area known as the final resting place of Apache warriors who died in battle. "The heartbreaking thing is we're watching them detonate these areas that will never be finished," says Laiken Jordahl of the nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity in Arizona. He calls it "a true desecration of indigenous land."

Why is Trump so focused on adding to the wall?

Trump started his 2015 campaign with a promise to build "a big, beautiful wall" on the 2,000-mile-long border with Mexico and make Mexico foot the bill. The idea ascended to mythical status among his supporters, becoming a totem for nearly everything that he stood for: "America First," reduced immigration, closed borders. When Trump leaves office, he believes, the wall he did succeed in building will stand as a monument to his presidency — a kind of anti-Statue of Liberty.

What will Biden do?

President-elect Joe Biden has said "there will not be another foot of wall constructed in my administration," although he's indicated that he has no plans to tear down what's been built already. Biden has said he prefers "smart" border security achieved by installing surveillance systems, sensors, and lighting, rather than barriers. Nonetheless, the Trump administration continues to clear land for wall that may never be built. Some of the most invasive construction is now being conducted in New Mexico's remote Guadalupe Canyon, 30 miles from the nearest town of Douglas, as blasting crews carve a path through the rock. The area, according to a World Wildlife Fund report, includes some of the "most endangered and critical habitats in North America." Diana Hadley, whose family farm encompasses much of the canyon, called the construction "heartbreaking," and also "totally pointless" because so few migrants cross in the area.

Does the wall work?

Trump says the wall is "virtually impenetrable." But *The Washington Post* has documented that drug smugglers and migrants have been sawing through the bollards in minutes with a \$100 household reciprocating saw. Some migrants have used ladders or simply shimmy up over the top of the wall. Massive drug trafficking continues, with much of it coming across the border hidden in trucks carrying commercial cargo. Mark Morgan, the acting commissioner of Customs and Border Protection, said, however, that the wall has succeeded in squeezing illegal immigration into more easily patrolled bottlenecks. Halting construction, he said, would have a "dramatic negative impact." Border arrests have recently spiked to nearly 100,000 a month — far higher than at any point during the Obama

administration. Local officials in Douglas say the wall has made the town safer. "We'd reached the saturation point of finding illegal aliens in our back alleys," said Donald Huish, Douglas' Republican mayor. "Now that situation has changed."

How much did the new wall cost?

The administration has spent more than \$8 billion of the \$15 billion allocated so far, making the wall one of the largest infrastructure projects in American history. Only \$4.5 billion was actually authorized by Congress, with the rest seized from Pentagon construction and counternarcotics funding and the Treasury Forfeiture Fund. This has sparked lawsuits arguing that Trump trampled upon Congress' power of the purse; the Supreme Court has allowed construction to continue until it hears arguments in the case. The administration has also filed 144 lawsuits against landowners whose property is crucial to building the wall. So far, the government has seized 285 acres using eminent domain, paying between \$1,440 and \$870,261 per acre. Richard Drawe ceded part of his Progreso, Texas, homestead to the government rather than face the Justice Department in court. Now the steel bollards stretch along his property in an area that once offered stunning views of sunsets and a lake that's home to cranes and roseate spoonbills. "I'm used to living out in the open," he said, "no fences, doing what I want to do. I don't want to see a damn wall when I step out the door."

Making Mexico pay — or not

President Trump continued to insist right up to the election that Mexico was indeed paying for the wall. "Mexico is paying," he recently said at a campaign rally in Sanford, Fla. "They hate to hear that," he reiterated in Johnstown, Pa. "But they're paying." He has also falsely claimed that a tax on money that immigrants send to their native countries is financing the wall, as well as a tax on cars and trucks crossing the border. These new taxes do not exist. On other occasions, he has claimed that the U.S-Mexico-Canada trade agreement, or USMCA, clawed back money from Mexico to pay for the wall. The White House has even published a position paper on all the ways that Mexico would be made to pay. None of that is true, said Tony Payan, director of the Center for the United States and Mexico at Rice University. "It is, so far, all American taxpayers' money," Payan said.

Response option(s):

- After reading the article, what is one main idea that you find most remarkable (meaning, "most worthy of a remark" -- so it can be interesting, concerning, confusing, alarming, offensive, etc)? What is it that you find so remarkable? Explain.
- After reading the article, what additional questions do you have? Research these on your own and write about what you find.
- Summarize any point made in the article and respond.