



## The Bunkhouse Chronicle

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Columnist

### The Great Wall of Trump

Many of us remember Robert Frost. Typically, we even have enough of his inestimable work committed to memory to recite a few lines: “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,” for instance, or the notable bit from “Mending Wall” where a laconic neighbor says: “Good fences make good neighbors.”

That line may even be true — I often think so — though the speaker in Frost’s poem doesn’t buy it.

I don’t know what to make of the proposed Trump Wall on our southern border. I don’t know if it will happen, or if Trump’s pledge was merely pulp for popular consumption. And nobody can know with any certainty what the result of building it might or might not be.

I once sat in a room full of narcotics detectives where DEA agents shared photos of the ramps built on the

southern side of the border fence — to jump cars laden with meth from Culiacan Superlabs into Los Estados Unidos.

I can only make inroads toward an intelligent opinion when I put the proposed wall up against my own experience. Here in Oregon, and particularly in Sisters, we are largely insulated from thinking about the results of illegal immigration and the attendant human and dope trafficking because we don’t brush up against the consequences each and every day.

I will stipulate in advance that my thoughts about wall-building — from the perspective of law enforcement — do not, and should not, frame the entire discussion.

The vast majority of people I arrested in narcotics work were in the country illegally, to the point of near exclusivity. This is not surprising, given that Mexican cartels control virtually every aspect of the narcotics trade.

What was surprising, at least to me, was our inability to do much about it.

For a time, obtaining an ICE detainer on arrested subjects merely required a phone call and a sympathetic agent on the phone. The detainer was faxed to the jail, and the arrestee held. One day that suddenly changed and it became impossible to acquire a detainer under almost any circumstance — other than a homicide booking — and even that was questionable.

Then it changed again: we were unable to even arrest people with felony re-entry warrants. To be clear, it wasn’t that we couldn’t physically take them into custody — we just couldn’t book them because the jail, with a sheriff mindful of his constituency, and a facility perpetually over-capacity, simply wouldn’t take them.

Wrap your head around that.

California officers, and I suspect the same is true of those in Oregon and elsewhere, routinely accept Mexican Consular Cards as legitimate identification — though that is actually against the law. The people I encountered most always carried bogus Social Security cards, and other counterfeit forms of ID, all of which were crimes, and none of which the DA’s office would ever prosecute.

Often, after our department began taking thumbprints on every citation, the lab techs would discover the cited subject had given a false name, and was actually wanted on multiple warrants, often in several states, under a menu of different names, and for a smorgasbord of both violent and non-violent crimes.

The hospitals in the city I served were overwhelmed, routinely, with illegal immigrants who filled the emergency rooms and used the services as a primary care solution. It was not uncommon to find large crowds of

people waiting in the parking lots outside. It was also generally known that being brought in by ambulance was a smart move — it at least guaranteed being wheeled into the actual hospital, and perhaps even being treated in a timely fashion. Provided, of course, that the available beds weren’t already occupied by gang members — many of them illegally in the country — full of bullet holes or stab wounds.

All of that trouble is headed toward Central Oregon, by the way.

On May 2, the U.S. Department of Justice released statistics on illegal immigrants incarcerated in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. As of March 25, 2017, there were 41,528 illegal immigrants in the federal prison system, to the tune of about 1.2 billion taxpayer dollars a year. Those numbers only account for the federal system, and say nothing about the county jail and state prison populations across the country, which are considerably higher, and whose cost can fairly be assessed in the many billions more.

On the other hand, it’s also likely that illegal immigrants have done more than anyone else to preserve the relatively low cost of living we all enjoy, by virtue of their willingness to work for nearly nothing. A fact that many large businesses — who lobby vigorously against meaningful immigration controls — also enjoy.

There is, furthermore, absolutely no doubt in my mind that the vast majority of people who come into this country — legally or otherwise — want nothing more than an opportunity to improve their station in life, to educate their children, and to pursue happiness. Even as they break our laws to get here, the overwhelming percentage of illegal entrants take up quiet — almost subterranean — lives once they arrive.

The real question, it seems, is whether or not building a gigantic wall is the solution to any of these problems. One wonders if a huge border wall isn’t destined to become a shabby tourist attraction for some distant version of us, like the Long Walls of Athens, or Hadrian’s Wall.

Frost didn’t like his neighbor’s insistence on a wall. “Before I built a wall,” he wrote, “I’d ask to know what I was walling in or walling out.”

That’s a good and important question, with resonant consequences, and we should probably, if we are still capable of it, engage in a more circumspect conversation about what it means to build a wall. We should wonder aloud if it will actually work, at least in the way it is couched, and at the very least with a studied eye on how our great-great-grandchildren might come to understand our intent.

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