

## On the Fence

### Will a wall on the border improve national security?

*Wall: a bad attempt to create the world's largest gated community*

*Impacts of weak security at border necessitate immediate action*

I could write about the wall, its cost and how it just grows an already bloated deficit, how ineffective it will be, and how the majority of U.S. citizens don't support it. I could also write about how McAllen, Texas, one of the largest towns on the Mexican border, has a crime rate that's at a 30-year low. But I'm not going to do that. Instead, I'm going to talk about the past. I remember how we got here all too clearly.

It may be hard to believe given our budding friendship with them, but for decades we were all supposed to hate the Russians who were our blood enemies. We hated their ideas so much we did the unthinkable, training local police forces in Central America, working with them to build death squads to oppose any semblance of protest. That was done in Guatemala, as just one example. In that country, we had overthrown the legitimately elected president in 1954 and a military dictatorship ruled until the mid-1990s. The violence continues to this day. Support for such dictatorships was very prevalent right up to, and including, Saddam Hussein in Iraq. In Guatemala it was done to oppose movements such as liberation theology, a Catholic social-justice movement.

That training proved all too effective, reaching right into the rural mountain villages. Those villages are home to the descendants of the Mayan people, including the places where the two children who've just died while in U.S. custody were from. In the most horrific incident, 350 people were slaughtered. The details are too brutal to recount here, but the San Francisco massacre in 1982 is no secret. It was led by the general who we supported and who came to power that same year in one more military coup.

That's the backdrop for those seeking asylum from what are right now record levels of political violence in Central America. John Kelly, who recently resigned as White House chief of staff, said parents are simply trying to save their children from that violence. Those immigrants, according to U.S. asylum law, are allowed a fair hearing on those requests if they have a fear "on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political



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opinion."

Instead, we have an un-elected official, White House adviser Stephen Miller, making the policy decision to exclude not just illegal but legal immigration requests from those seeking to escape the bloodshed. Doesn't this sound like the deep state we've been hearing about? Why should that decision be left to a person very few of us know? In a twisted bit of irony, Mr. Miller's own family left Russia to escape just such violence targeting his religion. That comes across as very hypocritical and, to me, very un-American.

We can talk about building a wall, but in my opinion that's just a bad attempt to create the world's largest gated community. Instead, we should talk about the values that have made the country truly great. It's been a beacon for immigrants, people wanting to build a new life. The number of immigrants stopped at the U.S.-Mexican border has been declining for 10 years, so those apprehensions have reached the lowest level since 1970. But the number of unaccompanied children and families has been rising. General Kelly had it right. People are trying to save their children. We have a responsibility to listen to them.

As for dictators, years ago I wrote in this very newspaper about how our support for tyrants might make us unable to recognize one if he or she came walking down our street. That's as true today as it was when I wrote it. In a democracy, there are an endless series of decisions that need to be made to preserve freedom. This is one more of those crossroads. Make your choice.

(Sources: [www.thenation.com/article/border-patrol-refugees-guatemala-cia-war-crimes](http://www.thenation.com/article/border-patrol-refugees-guatemala-cia-war-crimes); [www.wola.org/analysis/fact-sheet-united-states-immigration-central-american-asylum-seekers](http://www.wola.org/analysis/fact-sheet-united-states-immigration-central-american-asylum-seekers); [www.snopes.com/fact-check/stephen-miller-descendant-asylum-seekers-fled-anti-semitic-violence](http://www.snopes.com/fact-check/stephen-miller-descendant-asylum-seekers-fled-anti-semitic-violence))



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Yes, a wall on the border will improve national security. With unprecedented levels of hollow political posturing, conflicting arguments abounding and many times accurate data being misrepresented or discounted, it behooves us to explore the issue further in order to understand why yes is the best answer.

There are at least two categorical issues that are at the core of the problem of weak security on our southern border that necessitate an immediate response. First is the loss of life suffered by those in the country legally (citizen or not) resulting from criminal acts committed by people who are in the country illegally.

Second is the portion of major problems — such as illegal narcotic and weapons distribution, human trafficking, money laundering, theft, rape and associated financial and emotional expenses — that can be attributed to those individuals and criminal organizations who are in the country illegally.

It can be easy to dismiss, misunderstand or not believe the problems mentioned above are real, if one has not experienced any of them or their terrible impacts directly. But it is imperative for our basic safety and security and the general welfare of our society to learn the reality and seriousness of what is happening to many of our friends and neighbors. For instance, if we look at a few stats of criminal activities that have been committed by those in the country illegally or because the border is unsecured, it quickly becomes sobering:

- In 2017 and 2018, 4,000 illegal immigrants were arrested for murder (at a 1:1 ratio, that is nearly five murders a day).
- In 2017 and 2018, 30,000 illegal immigrants were arrested for sex crimes (at a 1:1 ratio, that is nearly 41 sexual assaults a day).
- 43 Americans die from heroin overdoses per day, and 90 percent of heroin is smuggled across the southern border.
- 68 percent of migrants seeking entry to the U.S. are victims of violence at some point along the way.

This damage will continue to grow in scale and number of people impacted and

get exponentially costlier to address the longer we delay in taking action. We do have a relatively easy and effective option available: a wall or physical barrier. Border walls have been used throughout history to effectively protect people and curtail or prevent unwanted activity from occurring. Whether it was the ancient Sumerian wall to keep hostile Amorites at bay, Hadrian's wall to fortify and delineate Roman boundaries or the Great Wall of China to defend against barbarian invasions, walls work well. The quickest and most effective immediate improvement we can make is to add a wall to the southern border. This will stop much illegal activity now, empower those guarding our border and give us the necessary time to develop long-term solutions and approaches to the border security issue.

Although not addressed in this opinion, and often conflated with border security, are the issues of immigration policy, national economic viability and counter-terrorism/threat response capacity. These three issues are weighty and complex and have high impact on our overall national security strategy. They have a largely dependent relationship to border security and should be fully addressed independently after the approach to securing our border is decided. For these reasons and due to the targeted word count of this opinion, I did not address any of these issues.

It is time to act. Knowing these problems are real and that they are causing great damage to our fellow citizens and country, we must not delay in doing what we can to help. Contact U.S. Senators Wyden and Merkley, State Senator Hansell, and State Representative Barreto, and let them know you support funding for a border wall.

(Sources: [www.heritageaction.com/toolkit/immigration-toolkit](http://www.heritageaction.com/toolkit/immigration-toolkit); [www.cato.org/blog/cost-border-wall-keeps-climbing-its-becoming-less-wall](http://www.cato.org/blog/cost-border-wall-keeps-climbing-its-becoming-less-wall))

### Your reactions to On the Fence

#### McCracken: Equal opportunity is a fallacy

To the Editor:  
All lottery tickets are created equal. And anyone who buys one has an equal opportunity and a level playing field for winning.

However, saying that Americans are created equal or that there is a level playing field for accessing opportunities for positive outcomes is nonsense.

One can begin making predictions as to future winners and losers starting before birth. The admiration given to individuals who do beat the odds is an admission that the playing field is not level. Societal, cultural and familial expectations influence

both individual goals and access.

Lack of adult support and supervision, inferior education, scarcity of nutritious food, inadequate housing, sexual abuse, unexpected pregnancy — all present tremendous disadvantages. So while everyone may have "equal opportunity under the law," that means little to a large percentage of children.

If America had meaningful "equal opportunity," there wouldn't be wide disparity in success rates between groups. Laura Eckstein in The Observer's Jan. 11 On the Fence notes she was born into poverty but managed to become a lawyer. She suggests that policies intended to help

individuals overcome disadvantages are unnecessary and demeaning. Yet some are born into families who provide all kinds of support to their children. Why should some paths to positive outcomes be far smoother than others? Why should some forms of help be viewed as demeaning? We don't view family help that way. In America many revere families of wealth and privilege while blaming and scolding the poor. Why? Often wealth is accumulated through systemic exploitation of others, the system and public resources. Consult "A People's History of the United States" by Howard Zinn for examples.

Girls are disproportionately at risk of falling short in reaching their potential. Thankfully recent changes opened up a wide range of opportunities for women and people of color unimaginable just 50 years ago.

Meanwhile, single parenting is becoming more common and generally falls to women. Single parenting entails a myriad of demands on time, emotions and finances. Many single mothers attempting to earn a living, raise children, plus attend and succeed at college drop out before graduation. For many single mothers, simply supporting a family is often impossible given accumulated disadvantages. Society should

prioritize making opportunities available to all who are committed to achieve. A guaranteed minimum wage, affordable health care, quality education and nutritious foods are all essential before there is equal access to opportunities.

Rather than supporting programs to provide equal access, Republicans blame victims for their disadvantages. The current government shutdown exemplifies their disconnect from working Americans. Progressives support systemic programs to enable everyone equal access to opportunities and outcomes.

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