

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

April 2, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense, Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Secretary Esper,

We write to you out of concern about reports of accelerated border wall construction during the coronavirus pandemic. While we appreciate that states and localities may have variance in restrictions on activities such as construction, the CDC has issued clear guidance on social distancing and other precautions that must necessarily be observed across the country, including by military and Department personnel, to blunt coronavirus impacts.

We appreciate the precautions you have directed across DoD, including stopping troop movements and limiting training and exercises. Similarly, the military can be a leader in demonstrating appropriate restraint and halting non-essential projects, such as construction of the border wall, that put personnel and communities at risk. Additionally, it is inappropriate to proceed with the eminent domain procedures associated with Texas construction projects at a time when Americans are rightly focused on the immediate needs of health and safety.

We are proud of the military's efforts in our own communities and across the country to aid in our battle against coronavirus. The President has declared a national state of emergency and our exceptional National Guard troops and Army Corps are already assisting emergency public health responses in many states while the USNS Comfort and USNS Mercy are supporting hospital care. As the need grows, the Department may be called upon to provide additional support. This is where our attention should be.

At a time when our nation is fighting against a dangerous pandemic and resources are scarce, we urge you to concentrate your own resources and efforts where they are most needed and heed public health guidance for non-essential projects such as the border wall.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Veronica Escobar". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Veronica Escobar
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

This letter is sent on behalf of the following additional Members of the House of Representatives:

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Deb Haaland
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Jackie Speier
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Ruben Gallego
MEMBER OF CONGRESS