

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

October 11, 2007

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

As Members of Congress who represent border communities, we are requesting an extension of the public comment period for the Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) and Environmental Assessments (EAs) of “tactical infrastructure” along the U.S./Mexico international border. Furthermore, in areas along the Arizona border where fence construction has begun without any public comment periods, we request that you suspend construction until such time that a proper EIS, including public comment, can be conducted that takes into consideration the cumulative impacts of numerous, and segmented, fence construction projects currently underway there. The construction of fencing along the US-Mexico border – with a monumental affect on property owners, the local economy, and public lands – is very important to our constituents and warrants far more than just three weeks time to submit public comments.

On September 24, 2007, the notice of intent to prepare EISs and EAs were posted to the Federal Register; however, no public meetings have been held, or are planned, in any of our communities. We understand the Department of Homeland Security held public meetings prior to announcing their formal plans, but not holding meetings now is completely unacceptable.

In late September, fence construction began within the San Pedro National Riparian Conservation Area. The EA for this project was never put out for public comment prior to the beginning of construction, similar to other EAs for fence construction in Arizona, nor has the DHS undertaken a comprehensive EIS to examine the cumulative impacts of fence construction on the border environment in Arizona. Instead, various federal agencies are engaged in conducting piecemeal EAs that do not provide a comprehensive look at the issue.

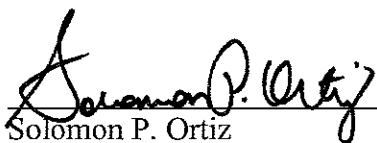
Much of the fencing along the Southwest Border is on protected lands and wildlife refuges, or along levees that protect our communities from flooding. In addition to the cost of this politically expedient infrastructure and the depressed effect it will have

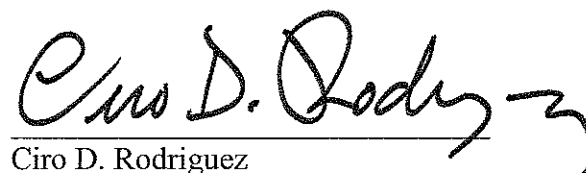
on the local economy, taxpayers paid more than \$100 million to improve these public lands and many of our communities are undergoing flood map modernization. DHS must carefully examine these monumental issues and hold several public hearings to allow local community input to inform the nation and the national economy what is to come.

No one understands the intricacies of border communities – and the detrimental impact rushing into construction of fencing will have – more than the residents along the US-Mexico border. Our communities support safe and secure borders and simply ask for adequate time to share their concerns with their government, as they have a right to do.

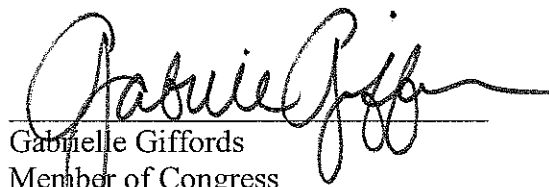
We ask that you extend the public comment period and organize public hearings in every sector that will be impacted prior to making any final decisions. And, in places like Arizona, where there has been no public comment at all, DHS should immediately halt construction and initiate an EIS process for the area.

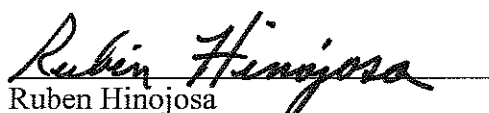
Sincerely,


Solomon P. Ortiz
Member of Congress


Ciro D. Rodriguez
Member of Congress


Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress


Gabrielle Giffords
Member of Congress


Ruben Hinojosa
Member of Congress