

# Texas governor signs series of reactionary laws, announces plan to build border wall

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Over the last month, Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott and the Republican-controlled state legislature have enacted a series of reactionary laws attacking immigrants and robbing residents of their democratic rights.

Last Wednesday Abbott announced details of his plan for the state to build its own wall along the Texas-Mexico border, beginning with the hiring of a “program manager” and providing \$250 million in state funds as a “down payment.”

“The Biden administration has abandoned its responsibility to apply federal law to secure the border and to enforce the immigration laws, and Texans are suffering as a consequence of that neglect by the Biden administration,” Abbott said. “In the federal government’s absence, Texas is stepping up to get the job done.”

The governor did not specify how long the wall would be, where its construction would take place, or the estimated cost of the entire project, saying those factors would be determined by the program manager. The governor ordered the Texas Facilities Commission to hire a program manager to begin work on the project.

He acknowledged that construction of a wall would cost “far more than \$250 million” but said he and lawmakers will follow through with their plan.

“It’s my commitment, as well as the commitment of the people in this room, as well as the people in this Capitol, to make sure that we see this project through,” he said.

Abbott’s initiative follows in the footsteps of the Trump administration, which built about 450 miles of walls and other barriers, mostly in Arizona. Although Trump faced numerous legal battles and resistance from landowners in Texas unwilling to allow construction on their lands, Abbott said that he

expected citizens to both donate their own money and volunteer their land for the planned barrier.

“My belief based upon conversations that I’ve already had is that the combination of state land, as well as volunteer land will yield hundreds of miles to build a border wall in Texas,” he said.

The exorbitant “down payment” will come from the state’s \$250 billion budget, with funds being redirected from other departments. Lawmakers will allocate money from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice into a disaster account, which will then be moved to the Texas Facilities Commission for the border wall construction.

The average cost of the portions of the wall which the Trump administration has already built was \$26 million, with the price going up to \$41 million per mile in parts of Arizona and canyon areas.

Abbott has blamed the Biden administration’s immigration policies for the increase of migrants attempting to cross the state’s southern border, claiming new federal policies have paved the way for “dangerous gangs and cartels, human traffickers, and deadly drugs like fentanyl to pour into our communities.” This is despite the fact that during her trip to Guatemala earlier this month, Vice President Kamala Harris brazenly told migrants “do not come” and declared that they would be turned away.

The *Texas Tribune* reported that the US Customs and Border Protection recorded 180,034 border apprehensions in May, compared to fewer than 25,000 in late 2020. During the Trump administration, the highest recorded number of monthly arrests was nearly 150,000.

Two weeks ago, Abbott announced a partnership with the state of Arizona to deploy law enforcement officials to help border states arrest migrants attempting to enter

the country. Oklahoma, Arkansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Florida have sent law enforcement officers, and Georgia and South Carolina have sent National Guard members, Abbott said.

Earlier in the year, Abbott deployed Texas National Guard troops to the border and ordered the Texas Department of Public Safety to arrest immigrants and charge them for violating state laws such as trespassing, illegal entry, smuggling and human trafficking.

At the beginning of June, Texas lawmakers approved an initiative to promote “patriotic education” through the creation of the 1836 Project, named for the year Texas declared independence from Mexico. When Abbott signed the project into law, he declared that “we must never forget why Texas became so exceptional in the first place.”

The measure earned bipartisan support in the state legislature, passing the House by a vote of 124 to 19, and 22 to 9 in the Senate. The bill establishes a panel of nine political appointees tasked with educating about Texas history, whose work will mostly be found in informational pamphlets given to Texans receiving driver’s licenses.

The bill specifies themes in Texas history that the panel will promote, including “Native American and Black history; Spanish and Mexican heritage in Texas; the state’s War for Independence; the Juneteenth celebration when slaves learned they were free by law; and the U.S. annexation of Texas,” wrote the *Houston Chronicle*. Because the panel members are appointed by the state’s reactionary leadership, it is doubtful that the project will be of an objective and honest character.

Rather, it was initiated as a chauvinistic response to the *New York Times*’ 1619 Project, which was published two years ago. Republicans across the country have seized on the project’s racist falsifications to posture as defenders of the United States’ revolutionary heritage while promoting their own fascistic interpretation of American history. The creation of the 1836 Project followed Texas explicitly banning the use of the 1619 Project in K-12 school curriculum.

The Texas Constitution of 1836 created the Republic of Texas, not yet part of the US, and was a document that protected the interests of slave owners. It included multiple provisions to preserve slavery and explicitly denied permanent residency to any “free person of

African descent, either in whole or in part.” Additionally, Tejanos, Mexican nationals that lived in the new republic and helped fight for its independence, were disenfranchised. It is doubtful that these subjects, or other reactionary episodes in the state’s history will be seriously addressed.

More recently, Governor Abbott signed House Bill 1927, which eliminates the requirement for residents to obtain a license to carry a handgun. Beginning September 1, adult residents will be allowed to carry a handgun if they are not prohibited by state or federal law from possessing a firearm. Abbott also signed bills which remove criminal penalties for the use of gun silencers, allow for guns to be stored in hotel rooms and make Texas a “Second Amendment Sanctuary State,” aimed at blocking the enforcement of federal gun regulations.

Responding to the concerns of law enforcement officials, the state Senate eliminated a provision that would have barred officers from questioning people based only on their possession of a handgun. Additionally, an amendment was added enhancing the criminal penalties for felons and family violence offenders caught unlawfully carrying a gun.



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