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## Mexico: Plan for border fence 'deplorable'

**TIJUANA, Mexico** (AP) -- Mexico lobbied for six years for a comprehensive immigration reform that would allow millions to cross into the United States legally. Instead, they're getting a fence.

Mexicans, from leading politicians to migrants preparing to cross illegally, consider the U.S. plan to fence off much of the border shameful, offensive and ill-conceived.

President Bush on Wednesday signed a bill that would allot \$1.2 billion for hundreds of miles of fencing along the U.S.-Mexican border and for more vehicle barriers, lighting and infrared cameras.

But migrants resting at a Tijuana shelter after being deported from the United States said more walls wouldn't deter them. Alfonso Martinez, a 32-year-old from southern Mexico, had been working as a farmhand for six months in Vista, California, when he was arrested and deported last week.

"Wall or no wall, I will try at least three times," said Martinez, who said he would try to cross by himself through Tecate, a mountainous town about 35 miles east of Tijuana. "I have three girls that I have to support, and in Mexico there is no work."

The Mexican government and Mexican immigrants in the United States have lobbied lawmakers for more ways to cross the border and work legally.

While Bush had proposed a temporary worker program, it did not garner enough support in Congress for passage. The idea has been dropped by Washington, at least until after the November congressional elections.

Congress focused on security over immigration, arguing the porous border could be used by terrorists who want to sneak into the United States undetected. There is no evidence that has happened, however.

The Mexican government this week sent a diplomatic note to Washington criticizing the plan for 700 miles of new fencing along the border. Foreign Secretary Luis Ernesto Derbez called it an "offense" and said Wednesday his office was considering taking the issue to the United Nations.

But Ruben Aguilar, the spokesman for Mexican President Vicente Fox, said Thursday that Mexico had ruled out that possibility. He added he was "confident" the additional fencing would never become a reality because an immigration accord would eventually replace it.

President-elect Felipe Calderon Thursday criticized the U.S. plan, but said the case is a bilateral issue that should not be taken to any international organization.

"I think it is a deplorable decision that has been made by the United States Congress for the construction of this wall, and it does not solve our common problem, which is emigration," Calderon told a news conference in Santiago, Chile.

Guillermo Alonzo, a migration expert at the Tijuana-based Colegio de La Frontera Norte, said fences will force migrants to look find new routes into the United States through more dangerous terrain.

"When migrants are determined to cross, they find a way to jump the fences," Alonzo said. "Walls don't stop anything."

Alonzo cited the construction of a fence between Tijuana and San Diego, known in Mexico as "the tortilla wall." It was completed in the 1990s and forced migrants into the sparsely populated and dangerous Arizona desert.

While there are walls at various points along the border, the one in Tijuana is the longest stretch, running 14 miles west from the Otay border crossing to the Pacific Ocean.

The wall is a symbol of the divisive immigration issue. It has become a kind of shrine marked with graffiti, crosses, photos and remembrances of those who have lost their lives trying to sneak into the United States. Some families divided by the border even meet at the fence, talking through the metal wires.

While the wall reduced the amount of illegal migration from Tijuana, migrants continue to use the city as a jumping-off-point when crossing the border, Alonzo said.

"Now smugglers hide migrants in trunks of cars or get false documents," he said.

Luis Kendzierski, a priest who directs a Tijuana migrant shelter, said building a wall is an unfriendly gesture that will lead to a hike in smugglers' fees and more migrant deaths.

Between 2001 and 2006, almost 2,000 migrants died while trying to sneak into the United States, according to El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

"We are supposed to be neighbors and friends, and instead of building bridges and doors, we're building obstacles," Kendzierski said.

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