

**Testimony of Nayda Alvarez, Border Landowner
Before the House Committee on Homeland Security,
Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation and Operations
on Examining the Effect of the Border Wall on Private and Tribal Landowners**

February 27, 2020

It is an honor to testify before this distinguished Subcommittee about the severe harms Trump's border wall would have on my family's land, my community, and my country.

My name is Nayda Alvarez and I live in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas in a small community called La Rosita in Starr County, along the US – Mexico border. I own and live on land that has been passed down within my family for five generations.

Thanks to the president's campaign promise to build a wall across the entire border in Texas, my home is now in the path of the border wall, and the federal government has sued me to get access to my land through eminent domain. I have been living with the threat of the border wall for more than a year. I had the opportunity to testify before the House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties Hearing on the National Emergencies Act on February 28, 2019. Unfortunately, since then we have already begun to see the devastation as Trump's border wall has begun to go up in South Texas.

My family has peacefully lived and worked in Starr County and my family has a long history of working in law enforcement. I have lived on this land for more than 40 years with my family, alongside where my grandfather lived. I worry about my father's health once our land, our home, is taken. This land was also my mother's home, where she raised a family, where she lived her last days, and where she took her last breath this past March.

This land is where my daughters were raised and where I see my grandchildren play. This land is not only my home, but it is a place of gathering for my family, it is part of my family history, and the inheritance passed down to me from my ancestors - a tradition I intend to continue. However, this ancestral home will be destroyed by the construction of the border wall.

With the construction of the border wall, my plans for the future are filled with uncertainty now. I have been a teacher for 22 years, and anticipated retiring in a few years. However, I can no longer plan for tomorrow because I do not know what will happen tomorrow, much less in the future.

The government has already sued me, wanting access to my land for an entire year – so they can survey and decide how much of my land they will take through eminent domain. This access would give the government the right to come onto my land and tear things apart - make borings, cut vegetation, and do whatever else they want on my home and property without me being able to do anything about it. The government has offered me just \$100 for this access - which is what they think is a fair price for giving up so much.

There is no reason for my home to be sacrificed to simply fulfill an expensive and needless campaign promise. As a lifetime resident of the Rio Grande Valley, I know there is no emergency in my home. There is no “invasion.” I have never felt unsafe in my own community, having grown up with a father who served in law enforcement for over 40 years and a brother who has been in law enforcement in Starr County for more than 20 years. On the contrary, Starr County is one of the safest places to live in America – and yet it is already one of the most over-policed areas of our country. Despite living in a quiet community with very little crime, helicopters frequently fly overhead, local police, sheriffs, and state troopers, along with federal agencies like the Border Patrol are a constant unwelcome presence in my peaceful home. This over policing is what unnecessarily makes our home and our county look like a warzone.

In more than 40 years of living on the border, I cannot say that I have ever seen migrants crossing into the United States across my family’s property. To do so, they would have to cross the river, and then they would have to climb up a bluff that runs alongside the river at the end of my property. The river and the bluff create a natural barrier on my family’s property, a natural barrier that already exists between Mexico and my land in the U.S. No explanation was ever given to me as to why the U.S. government plans to spend billions to construct an artificial one.

There has been no transparency in this process and we have been intimidated by government officials to sign over rights to our land. We have been talked down to by government representatives who think we are not aware of our rights. With no respect for the excruciating life events we were experiencing, when my mother was on her deathbed, government officials

continued to call and were still asking our family that we sign over to the government our rights to the land. I had to remind these individuals that my mother was dying of cancer in order to stop the calls.

Furthermore, the government is hastily rushing through construction processes in anticipation of the 2020 elections. It is waiving all laws, without any real concern for the landowners, the land, and wildlife. I cannot compete with the government's ability to waive laws and rush through this process without consideration. I have seen maps that are incomplete at best, showing that the government is not fully documenting the land and taking into account the geography or topography of it, and its ability to withstand such a monstrous construction project. The border wall that already fell down in California in late January is evidence of that.

The government plans to build a wall and a maintenance road just feet from my house. They describe a 150-foot wide "enforcement zone" between my house and the river – but my home is just 200 feet from the Rio Grande River and the land closest to the river is unstable and subject to erosion. When I asked government officials how they will fit the wall between my home and the river, they simply said they would "squeeze it in."

At the end of all this - will my home be south of the wall? Will it be torn down? Will I still have a home? My land? If I am able to keep my home, how can I live on my land with the border wall looming over it? I will lose my privacy and our way of life.

The Rio Grande Valley is very prone to flooding, having already experienced dangerous floods, but the government has shown no concern for our safety and the increased risks posed by the border wall. If there is another flood, my home could easily be washed away. All the hard work and a lifetime of building my dreams are thwarted by this border wall, as are those of so many other residents of the Rio Grande Valley.

Thank you again for granting me this opportunity to testify. I am ready to address any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted by:

Nayda Alvarez