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FOUR COMPANIES CHOSEN TO BUILD PROTOTYPES OF BORDER WALL

Trump administration announces winners of first bidding contest for a concrete barrier

By Alicia A. Caldwell and Laura Meckler
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Four companies were selected to build short sections of concrete wall as models for the U.S.'s border barrier with Mexico, in the first significant step toward fulfilling President Donald Trump's campaign promise.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection announced the four bid winners Thursday. They are Caddell Construction Co. LLC from Montgomery, Ala.; Fisher Sand & Gravel Co., doing business as Fisher Industries, in Tempe, Ariz.; Texas Sterling Construction Co. from Houston; and W.G. Yates & Sons Construction Company in Philadelphia, Miss.

The average cost of the prototypes is about \$450,000, and they will be 30 feet long and up to 30 feet high and made of solid concrete, according to Ron Vitiello, acting deputy commissioner for the border security agency. They will be built in San Diego.

Officials said the models will be evaluated to see which will work best. There could be multiple winners, or an alternate design could win.

Construction could start within a couple of weeks.

The agency will announce winners for a second bid, for other **types of wall designs**, as soon as next week. The administration said it is only considering concrete as a secondary barrier for areas where fencing already exists.

Mr. Trump first promised to build a wall at the Mexican border to check illegal immigration when he launched his presidential campaign in June 2015 and made it a central pillar of his campaign.

He also pledged that Mexico would pay to build the structure, an assertion the Mexican government has repeatedly denied.

Mr. Trump has threatened to shut down the government if Congress doesn't fund his \$1.6 billion request to build the wall. GOP congressional leaders have said they don't want a government shutdown, and many lawmakers believe a showdown over the funding is likely to be put off until December.

Though Mr. Trump has repeatedly said he wants to build a "big beautiful wall" with a "big beautiful door," he hasn't said how long the barrier would be.

A pair of contract notices released earlier this year called for design proposals for a concrete barrier and other structures as tall as 30 feet. Proposed designs, the contract notices said,

needed to be both difficult to get through or over but also aesthetically pleasing to people on the north side of the structure.

Mr. Trump has also recently changed his description of the wall from a solid structure to one that U.S. Border Patrol agents can see through. Officials say a solid concrete wall would only be built if it were placed alongside existing, see-through fencing.

There is roughly 650 miles of fencing already in place along the border, including in urban areas such as El Paso, Texas, and Nogales, Ariz. Nearly all of that fencing can be seen through.

Former Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly, who is now Mr. Trump's chief of staff, has said whatever is built won't stretch from "sea to shining sea."

Building anything along the border can be difficult because of varying types of terrain – the Big Bend National Park in West Texas straddles the border and is marked by towering cliffs – environmental concerns and a treaty with Mexico.

The waters of the winding Rio Grande mark the border in nearly all of Texas, where most of the land is privately owned, and a treaty with Mexico restricts construction at or near the river. The same treaty governs what can be built along a roughly 24-mile stretch of border in Arizona that is defined by the Colorado River.