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TRUMP SAYS HIS MEXICO BORDER WALL WON'T NEED TO COVER ENTIRE DISTANCE

Struggling to win approval for a promised border wall, the president scales back vision for wall touted in his campaign; fate of Dreamers program is 'a decision that I make'

By Laura Meckler
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WASHINGTON – President Donald Trump, who is struggling to win congressional approval for his [promised border wall with Mexico](#), now says that the project doesn't have to stretch along the entire southern border.

"It's a 2,000 mile border, but you don't need 2,000 miles of wall because you have a lot of natural barriers," he told reporters Wednesday on Air Force One [en route to Paris](#). "You have mountains. You have some rivers that are violent and vicious. You have some areas that are so far away that you don't really have people crossing."

Mr. Trump, who had previously suggested he wanted [a wall that would run along the entire border](#), said the wall could be more modest. "You'll need anywhere from 700 to 900 miles," he said.

It wasn't clear whether that estimate included the [654 miles of border that already have some sort of fencing on it](#). A White House spokesman didn't immediately respond to a request seeking clarification.

The Customs and Border Protection Agency has said that about 130 miles of the border aren't appropriate for a wall due to lakes, mountains and other natural barriers.

Mr. Trump also sought to take credit for the repairs and replacements already under way to existing fencing, which is far less controversial than building new barriers.

"You know, we've already started the wall because we're fixing large portions of wall right now," he said.

The White House has requested \$1.6 billion for next fiscal year to pay for about 74 miles of new or replacement barriers. House Republicans [included the funding in their Homeland Security spending bill](#), but the proposal faces a tough road in the Senate, where Democratic support is needed.

Mr. Trump repeated his preference for [a wall with solar panels attached](#), which is one of several proposals submitted for consideration by the Department of Homeland Security.

He also acknowledged that a solid wall is a bad idea for border agents who want to see through to the other side. Existing barriers are fences, in part for this reason.

"You have to be able to see through it," he said. He offered a scenario where someone surprises an agent by throwing a heavy sack of drugs over the wall and hits his head. "As crazy as that sounds, you need transparency through that wall," he said.

Mr. Trump campaigned on a vision of a towering, end-to-end wall and has insisted he will get it built. In modifying his preferences for the scope and the nature of the barrier, Mr. Trump brought his aims closer to the [views expressed by experts at Homeland Security](#).

Still, winning funding for even a portion of the more modest project will be challenging.

On another controversial immigration issue, Mr. Trump said he was responsible for deciding the fate of the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program](#), which gives a reprieve from deportation to undocumented young people brought to the U.S. as children.

This week, Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly met with members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and at least one lawmaker reported that he said the so-called Dreamers program's fate would be decided by Attorney General Jeff Sessions. That worried them because Mr. Sessions opposes the program. Several states have threatened to sue the administration if it doesn't kill the program.

Asked about this, Mr. Trump said the decision on the program's future was his.

"It's a decision that I make, and it's a decision that's very, very hard to make," he said. "I really understand the situation now."

He added that he would like a "comprehensive immigration plan," a phrase that generally refers to a combination of border security, changes to visa programs and legalization for undocumented residents. "But our country and political forces are not ready yet."