

-Oversight Hearing-

*“Destroying Sacred Sites and Erasing Tribal Culture:
The Trump Administration’s Construction of the Border Wall.”*

OPENING STATEMENT

February 26, 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have stated before that the most important task of the federal government is to keep its citizens safe. The flow of drugs and people across our southern border is extremely dangerous, and our Border Patrol is stretched too thin after years of neglect by the previous administration.

I know too well that violence in countries south of us drives illegal migration. But those who promote open borders here are doing a favor to drug cartels, terrorists, and human traffickers.

I have supported legislation that provides comprehensive border security by fully funding a border wall and ensuring that we’re not only stopping dangerous criminals from coming here illegally, but we’re also bringing criminals to justice that are already here.

I do however believe that we should always be respectful in cases where border security interests intersect tribal interests.

No one in this room believes that there should ever be a desecration of cultural artifacts or remains.

I am disappointed when illegal activities have caused cultural sites to be lost.

As has been mentioned, broad waiver authority has been exercised in certain circumstances with the construction of the border wall—

But the Department of the Interior has still been adhering to processes found in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act or NAGPRA.

Information from the Department of the Interior shows that two bone fragments to-date have been discovered in the project area, dating from the Archaic to Historic time periods. Both are in the process of being returned to the nearest tribe, the Tohono O'odham.

It is my understanding that water monitoring systems have been put in place to ensure levels remain the same at Quitobaquito Springs.

Illegal migration and the flow of drugs has a monumental impact on our communities.

We must work together to help stop the harm to tribes, the American people and the environment.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today and look forward to their testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.