

Trump tours border wall as presidency comes to a close

[HTTPS://WWW.BORDERREPORT.COM/HOT-TOPICS/THE-BORDER-WALL/TRUMP-TOURS-BORDER-WALL-AS-PRESIDENCY-COMES-TO-A-CLOSE/](https://www.borderreport.com/hot-topics/the-border-wall/trump-tours-border-wall-as-presidency-comes-to-a-close/)

by: [Sandra Sanchez](#)

Posted: Jan 12, 2021 / 06:06 PM GMT-0600 / Updated: Jan 12, 2021 / 06:06 PM

GMT-0600

ALAMO, Texas ([Border Report](#)) — In his first public appearance since the insurrection on the U.S. Capitol last week and just days before he leaves office, President Donald Trump traveled to deep South Texas on Tuesday and viewed a section of newly built border wall — a signature project of his administration — that he called “a great achievement.”

Trump took Marine 1 Helicopter to McAllen after landing in Harlingen, Texas, and then was driven to a remote area near Alamo, Texas, escorted by Texas state troopers to the mammoth 30-foot-tall steel structure that lines the Rio Grande. He arrived at 1:53 p.m. CST and took several minutes perusing the border wall along with U.S. Customs and Border Protection Acting Commissioner Mark Morgan and Border Patrol RGV Sector Chief Brian Hastings.

He signed a plaque commemorating the 450th mile of border wall completed by his administration and met privately with officials before speaking for about 15 minutes. He touted the successes of his administration, defended criticisms against his administration’s alleged involvement in last week’s mob uprising on the Capitol, and he scoffed at threats of impeachment. He also sent a strong warning to President-elect Joe Biden not to tear down the wall and to be careful what he does with immigration policies, warning it will cause “calamity” to the security of this nation.

“Unlike those who came before me, I kept my promises and today we celebrate a historic milestone: The completion of 450 miles of border wall,” Trump said.

Seated in plastic white chairs laid out before him were Border Patrol agents and CBP officers who he repeatedly praised. Notably absent were mayors or leaders of local communities, many of whom called for him not to visit the Rio Grande Valley and were fearful of rioting and violence with his visit.

“We worked long and hard to get it done. They said it couldn’t be done but it is the largest infrastructure projects in the history of our country,” Trump said. “It’s as strong as it’s going to get.”

The section of border wall that Trump visited on Tuesday is actually 35 feet tall and is the highest built section of border wall in Hidalgo County, Border Patrol officials told Border Report. This particular section has been painted jet black, just as another section in McAllen was painted prior to the Oct. 29 visit by then Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf and Morgan.

During his four-year term, Trump had proclaimed that he wanted all of the border wall to be painted black to make it hotter and potentially burn the hands of anyone who tried to scale it during an illegal entry into the United States. But the Border Patrol officials said black paint helps agents to locate those near it easier, and the “primer” could be applied to more areas of the wall.

“We gave you 100% of what you wanted and so now you have no excuses,” Trump said. “We can’t let the next administration even think of taking it down. That can’t happen”

His visit was criticized by many opponents who said the timing was meant to distract from ongoing impeachment proceedings in Washington, D.C. Congress on Tuesday night was expected to vote on a resolution regarding the 25th Amendment. On Wednesday, they could vote on one article of impeachment filed against him earlier this week.

“Free speech is under assault like never before. The 25th Amendment is of zero risk to me but will come back to haunt Joe Biden and the Biden administration. As the expression goes: ‘Be careful what you wish for.’ The impeachment hoax is a continuation of the greatest and most vicious witch-hunt in the history of our country and is causing tremendous anger and division and pain,” Trump said.

A giant American flag hung overhead as he spoke, hoisted on a crane. About 40 smaller U.S. flags were planted at the base of the border wall, along with several ATVs that are used in the field by agents in this area full of prickly pear cacti and mesquite trees.

The site of his visit was near Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, which is one of the first places where Trump had wanted to build the border wall when he took office in 2017. After much outcry from environmentalists and visits from several high-profile politicians, like then U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke, who was running for U.S. Senate, Congress finally deemed the wildlife refuge exempt from the border wall.

But it was clear from Tuesday's visit that Trump was making a statement in his last days in office that he was coming full circle from start to finish in his campaign promise to build a border wall on the U.S. border with Mexico. He said the border wall has helped to reduce apprehensions in the RGV Sector by 80% and in Yuma, Arizona, by 90%

However, out of the entire border, South Texas actually is the area where Trump built the least amount of border wall. Most of the land here is privately owned and the federal government has sued hundreds of homeowners in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, Zapata and Webb counties for right of entry onto their riverfront land. But with the pandemic and court cases slowed, the procurement process has been slow.

Morgan last week said that out of the 452 miles built, only 17 were in the Rio Grande Valley sector. Other new border wall miles built include:

- El Paso: 131 miles
- Tucson, Arizona: 114 miles
- Yuma, Arizona: 107n miles
- San Diego: 46 miles
- El Centro, California: 31 miles

The border wall he visited also was situated near the historic Eli Jackson Cemetery, a place where in 1857 a farmer and his former-slave wife had fled from Alabama and started a church and began shuttling escaped slaves south to Mexico in an underground railroad. The cemetery also is exempt from border wall, according to language written into the federal spending bills for fiscal year 2020 and 2021. But as media was being shuttled to the location where Trump was to arrive, much construction could be seen very close to the back of the cemetery.

GPS showed the location of his visit to be in the town of San Juan, Texas, but White House officials announced that Trump was coming to the border wall located in Alamo, Texas. A Border Patrol official told Border Report that the area he visited was actually an unincorporated section of Hidalgo County, which is right on the border and it was debatable whether it was in San Juan or Alamo.

Critics said Trump was coming to make a “last stand” in Alamo, using the town as symbolism. Prior to Trump’s arrival, protesters and Trump supporters on Tuesday lined Military Highway, which runs east to west and parallel to the border. State troopers and other law enforcement prevented the public from viewing Trump at the wall. Former U.S Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro, who made an unsuccessful bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2019, also came to South Texas to protest Trump’s visit.

Trump’s 15-minute speech read like a round-up of what he considered were immigration successes during his administration. He praised as a “groundbreaking agreement” the Migrant Protection Protocols program, or “Remain in Mexico” policy, which forces asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico during proceedings.

“They used to wait here and while they were waiting they’d say ‘bye bye’ and we’d never see them again,” Trump said.

He also touted third-country with Guatemala agreements, El Salvador and Honduras — known as the Northern Triangle — which now accepts asylum-seekers. He said the countries agreed to take migrants after the United States stopped foreign aid to those countries.

“Removing any of these measures would hamstring our workers, endanger our country and cost taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars,” Trump said. “If border security measures are reversed it will trigger a tidal wave... this would be a calamity to public safety and public health.”

Opponents criticized the visit and said the border wall continues to inflict environmental damage.

“Trump ends his disgraced presidency just as he started it, by demonizing immigrants, spewing xenophobia and threatening the safety of border communities,” said Laiken Jordahl, borderlands campaigner at the Center for Biological Diversity. “He’s desperate, so he’s trying to turn attention to his racist vanity wall. Trump and his violent rhetoric aren’t welcome in the borderlands.”

“President Trump’s visit today will not help in healing our country from the divisions he has encouraged,” Cameron County Judge Eddie Trevino Jr. said.

[Sandra Sanchez](mailto:Ssanchez@borderreport.com) can be reached at Ssanchez@borderreport.com.