

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 10, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Mullin and Secretary Rollins:

I write with urgent concerns about the ongoing drilling of high-capacity groundwater wells being carried out by federal border wall contractors in Luna County at the behest of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This drilling is being done without appropriate state permitting, regard for New Mexico water law, or coordination with border communities, and local ranchers and stakeholders fear they will lose vital water access when our state is already facing severe drought. DHS must immediately suspend any additional drilling, pumping, or use of wells until your agencies resolve this matter with the State of New Mexico and ensure that existing water rights, livestock wells, and historic springs will not be harmed. I also urge your agencies to immediately open transparent communications channels for additional input from local ranchers and landowners before any construction projects move forward in Luna County.

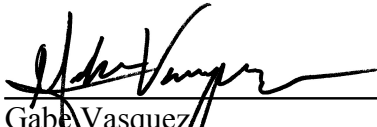
In southern New Mexico, water is life, and it is hard to come by. A high-capacity well, when drilled without appropriate permitting and oversight, can threaten the shallow wells and springs nearby that ranching families have relied on for generations to sustain their herds and their homes. In Luna County, border wall contractors ignored this reality — as well as permitting requirements and state law — and began this drilling without consulting landowners or conducting hydrologic analysis to ensure residents would not be harmed.

Following a local meeting in Luna County on July 9, ranchers alerted my office that Barnard Spencer Joint Venture, a DHS border wall contractor, has drilled wells within the Roosevelt Reservation and reportedly plans to place wells approximately every five miles along the border. These wells are designed to produce approximately 300 gallons per minute, while many nearby livestock and domestic wells produce only 3 to 7 gallons per minute.

The federal status of the Roosevelt Reservation does not, by itself, give DHS or its contractors unfettered access to pump groundwater without considering neighboring water users and state water law. DHS has safer and more responsible options, including permitted water sources nearby. There is no justification for the federal government to unilaterally gamble with the water supply of ranchers and families when lawful and cooperative alternatives exist.

I support securing our border. But it can be done without threatening ranchers, jeopardizing local water supplies, or ignoring the Americans who have stewarded this land for generations. I demand that DHS immediately suspend drilling and pumping from the disputed wells and direct its contractors to use properly permitted water sources. USDA must stand with the ranchers whose livestock, homes, and livelihoods depend on this water and work directly with DHS to resolve this issue. I look forward to your agencies promptly resolving this matter.

Sincerely,


Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress

Questions on Well Construction:

1. Is DHS or its contractors planning to drill groundwater wells approximately every five miles along the New Mexico–Mexico border?
2. How many wells have been drilled to date?
3. Where is each well located?
4. What is the status of each well (completed, under construction, dry, or producing)?
5. What is the depth and designed pumping capacity of each well?
6. What is the anticipated pumping rate and total volume of water to be withdrawn from each well?

Questions on Water Use:

7. What specific construction activities will this water be used for (e.g., concrete production, dust suppression, road construction, or other purposes)?
8. How much water is required for each of these activities?
9. Over what period of time will each well be operated?
10. Why are these new wells necessary when permitted water sources were used during previous border wall construction?
11. Why can't construction roads remain unpaved or use less water-intensive construction methods where feasible?

Questions on Impacts of Wells:

12. What hydrologic or groundwater studies were completed before drilling began?
13. Has DHS evaluated the potential impacts on:
 - a. Existing groundwater users and water rights?
 - b. Nearby livestock wells?
 - c. Historic springs?
 - d. Wildlife and wildlife-dependent water sources?
 - e. The underlying aquifer or groundwater basin?
14. Has DHS conducted any aquifer testing or groundwater modeling to evaluate drawdown or interference with neighboring wells?

Questions on Remediation:

15. If these wells impair existing water rights, livestock wells, or springs, what mitigation measures will DHS implement?
16. If groundwater impacts occur, what remediation plan is in place?
17. What is DHS's plan for each well once construction is complete? Will the wells be plugged and abandoned, transferred, or retained for future federal use?

Question on NM State Law:

18. Has DHS or its contractors obtained permits from the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer for these wells?
 - a. If not, what specific legal authority does DHS believe exempts these wells from New Mexico's groundwater permitting requirements?
19. Has DHS coordinated with the Office of the State Engineer before drilling these wells?
20. Why were affected landowners and neighboring water-right holders not notified before drilling began?