

Texas Governor Abbott vows to build a wall along Mexico border

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Abbott, who is up for re-election next year and has not ruled out a White House run in 2024, has made immigration a central issue since Biden took office [File: Kevin Jairaj/USA TODAY Sports via Reuters]

Austin, June 13 (RHC)-- The Republican governor of the U.S. state of Texas has announced plans to build a wall along the border with Mexico, drawing criticism from human rights organisations and advocacy groups.

Greg Abbott has, however, offered no details on his plans to construct the new barrier. He has also launched an aggressive campaign to arrest immigrants and asylum seekers. The moves may result in another clash with the Biden administration over immigration.

Abbott did not say how much new barrier Texas would erect, where it would be installed along the state's 1,930km (1,200 miles) of border or what it would look like when he made the announcement on Thursday in a room full of sheriffs in the border city of Del Rio. He promised more would be revealed next week.

A top official in one of Texas's largest border counties, Hidalgo County Judge Richard Cortez, said on Friday that he sees the goal as putting in place new barriers that would give state troopers grounds to arrest migrants who go around or damage it – and then put them in jail for six months.

"I understand why he wants to do it. It's a tool that gets him to a Class B misdemeanour," Cortez said. He was sceptical of whether jail would deter immigrants who travel hundreds of miles and risk death to get to the United States.

Abbott spokeswoman Renae Eze on Friday did not provide more details about the barrier plan and referred questions about arrests to a letter that Abbott and Arizona Governor Doug Ducey sent to other governors on Thursday asking them to send their own law enforcement ranks to the border. The letter tells governors their officers would arrive with the "power to arrest migrants who illegally cross the border into our territory."

Legal experts said the US Supreme Court has made clear that the power to enforce immigration law is in the hands of the federal government, including striking down efforts by Arizona Republicans a decade ago.

US Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas declined to comment on the Texas governor's plans while visiting a city cybersecurity centre in Los Angeles shortly after Abbott's announcement.

Biden suspended construction of a border wall upon taking office, and on Friday, his administration announced a plan to divert funding from what was former President Donald Trump's signature project.

Abbott, who is up for re-election next year and has not ruled out a White House run in 2024, has made immigration a central issue since Biden took office and taken increasing action over what he says is the new administration's failure to slow the flow of crossings.

"Long term, only Congress and the president can fix our broken border," Abbott said in Del Rio. "But in the meantime, Texas is going to do everything possible, including beginning to make arrests, to keep our community safe, to keep the cartels and smugglers out, and to keep your community safe."

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