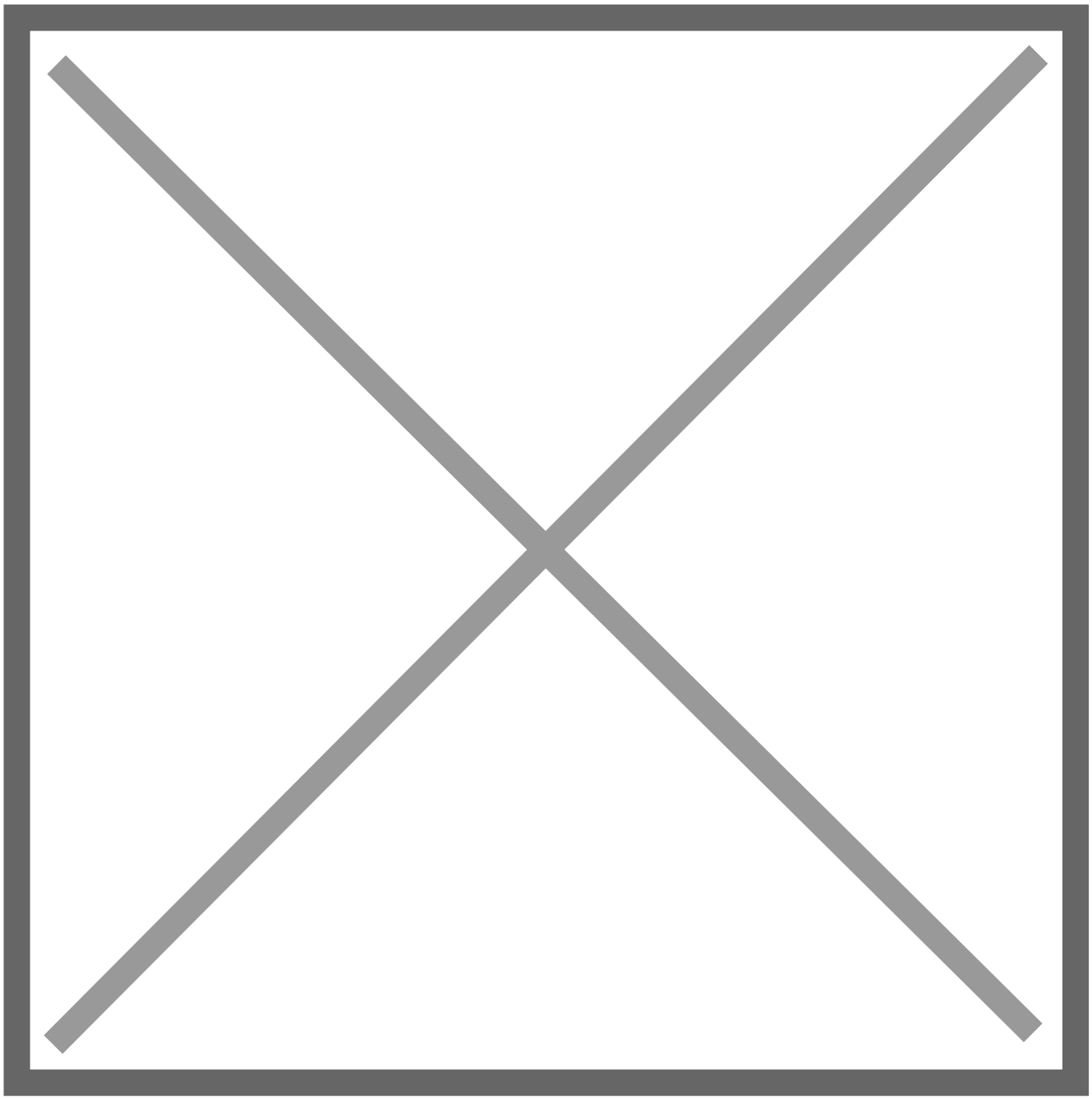
News



President Joe Biden delivers remarks during a visit at Tidewater Community College in Norfolk, Va., May 3, 2021. (CNS photo/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)



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The Biden administration announced April 30 it would stop paying for construction projects along the southern border between Mexico and the U.S., which were being funded with money originally designated for the military.

Although former President Donald Trump had promised during his presidential campaign that Mexico would pay for the wall to keep migrants out, his administration used billions of dollars designated for defense spending on the projects.

A Biden administration official said April 30 that "border wall construction under the previous administration tied up more than $14 billion in taxpayer funds, shortchanged our military and diverted attention away from genuine security challenges, like human traffickers."

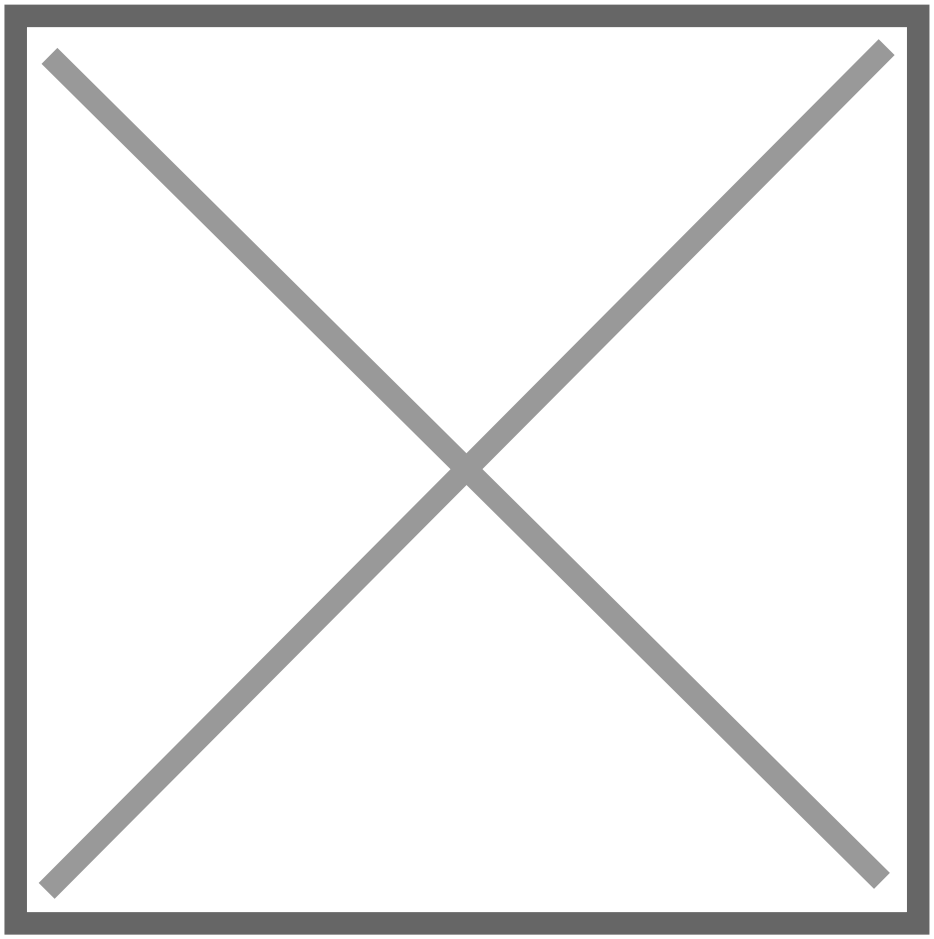
The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has long opposed construction of the wall, citing harm to migrants. In 2017, Bishop Joe S. Vásquez, who was chair of the USCCB's Committee on Migration, said he was "disheartened" with Trump's prioritization of building the wall on the border with Mexico.

"This action will put immigrant lives needlessly in harm's way. Construction of such a wall will only make migrants, especially vulnerable women and children, more

susceptible to traffickers and smugglers," he said.

"Additionally, the construction of such a wall destabilizes the many vibrant and beautifully interconnected communities that live peacefully along the border. Instead of building walls, at this time, my brother bishops and I will continue to follow the example of Pope Francis. We will 'look to build bridges between people, bridges that allow us to break down the walls of exclusion and exploitation.'"

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The Colorado River flows past the border wall in Andrade, Calif., April 19, 2021. The Biden administration canceled former President Donald Trump's border wall projects April 30 paid for with funds diverted from Defense Department accounts. (CNS photo/Reuters/Jim Urquhart)

With Mexico refusing to pay for the wall, as Trump had promised, his administration obtained more than $14 billion in U.S. taxpayer money to pay for it, which included

money that originally had been intended for the Pentagon and other military spending.

To justify the funneling of the money elsewhere, officials noted there are "higher priority items" more important to the national interests of the United States.

The border wall spending is part of a bevy of Trump-era immigration directives the Biden administration has been reviewing as it looks into immigration reform.

Biden administration officials said they would return remaining funds from the $14 billion to use as originally intended.

"To build a wall along the southern border, the previous administration redirected billions of dollars Congress provided for supporting American troops and their families and for purchasing military vehicles, aircraft and ships," Biden administration officials said in a statement.

They added that they would be "committed to upholding the rule of law, and properly equipping American troops and caring for their families."