

Durbin, Duckworth join call for review of cost and impact of Trump's travel ban, deportation plan and border wall

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today joined a group of senators calling on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review the actions and costs associated with President Donald Trump's recent executive orders to establish a mass deportation force, construct a wall on the Southern border, and ban refugees and immigrants from certain Muslim-majority nations.

“Each of these executive orders will likely require significant new action on the part of the relevant federal agencies and significant resources. However, there is a lack of information about the steps the agencies are taking to implement the orders and how much funding they need to carry out those steps,” the senators wrote in a letter to GAO. The senators raised the real possibility that to pay for these orders agencies will shift

resources away from much more effective national security programs without approval from Congress.

Citing the failed rollout of the orders which caused chaos and confusion at airports around the world, the senators raised concerns that the actions from the Administration have already negatively impacted the American economy, will only stand to further cause harm, and will fail to achieve its supposed goal, “Our concern about this lack of information is compounded by the fact that these executive orders are likely to inflict serious damage to our economy, our national security, and our relationships with allies abroad. The purported purposes of these orders was to bolster national security and public safety, but we are deeply concerned that the orders will not only fail to meet these objectives but will actively work against our national security and public safety.”

The letter was led by Senator Brian Schatz (D-HI) and signed by U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Edward Markey (D-MA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI).

Full text of the letter is available below:

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We write to request that the U.S. Government Accountability Office conduct a study on the actions taken by U.S. federal agencies to implement President Trump’s recent executive orders related to issues of immigration and border security and in particular the costs associated with these actions. The relevant orders include Executive Order (EO) 13767 “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements”; EO 13768 “Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States”; and EO 13769 “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.”

On January 25, 2017, President Trump issued EO 13767 instructing the Department of Homeland Security to begin constructing a border wall between the United States and Mexico among other initiatives related to border security and immigration law enforcement. On the same day, President Trump announced EO 13768, directing relevant executive departments and agencies to intensify their enforcement of immigration laws, including deporting removable aliens and penalizing localities that do not enforce federal immigration laws to the administration’s satisfaction.

On January 27, 2017, President Trump signed EO 13769 instructing federal agencies to suspend the U.S. refugee program for 120 days, to suspend entry for Syrian refugees indefinitely, and to temporarily bar entry into the United States for immigrant and non-immigrant travelers, with certain exceptions, from countries referred to in section 217(a)(12) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), 8 U.S.C. 1187(a)(12). Specifically, this section refers to the countries of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen.

Each of these executive orders will likely require substantial new action on the part of the relevant federal agencies and significant resources. However, there is a lack of information about the steps the agencies are taking to implement the orders and how much funding they need to carry out those steps. Additionally, we do not know how existing funds are being reprogrammed to implement the orders and the impact of this reprogramming on activities that Congress explicitly funded through appropriations. This information is vital for Congress to carry out its legislative, appropriations, and oversight functions.

Our concern about this lack of information is compounded by the fact that these executive orders are likely to inflict serious damage to our economy, our national security, and our relationships with allies abroad. The purported objective of these orders was to bolster national security and public safety, but we are deeply concerned that the orders will not only fail to meet this objective but will actively work against our national security and public safety.

These executive orders have already caused significant disruptions around the world. For example, EO 13769, which was abruptly announced and implemented, caught the public, relevant federal agencies, and the international community off guard and caused confusion and distress across many groups of people. As federal agencies and the public hastily adjusted to the EO, there were numerous reports about its resulting disruptions, including but not limited to: increased workloads for Custom and Border Protection agents and other federal agency officers; delays at airports and other points of entry; detention of legal permanent residents at airports; emotional distress for travelers impacted by the order; lost international business opportunities; delays in scientific research; and retaliation from and reciprocal actions taken by other countries. The heavy toll of this abrupt change in U.S. policy and its heartbreaking impact on individuals and their families is reflected in the lawsuits that have been filed in the wake of the EO and the success in obtaining temporary injunctions against the order.

All three of these executive orders will require substantial resources from relevant agencies to carry out the new directives. Just to name a few, such new activities under

these orders include: plan, design, and construct a border wall (which GAO has previously estimated would cost \$6.5 million per mile); construct, operate, control, or establish contracts for new detention facilities along the U.S.-Mexico border; reassign asylum officers and immigration judges to detention facilities; implement a mandatory detention policy for all aliens apprehended; hire an additional 5,000 CBP officers; expand the use of section 287(g) agreements to deputize local law enforcement to enforce federal immigration law; significantly broaden the scope of removal priorities; hire an additional 10,000 immigration officers; designate “sanctuary jurisdictions” and take enforcement actions against such jurisdictions and prohibit them from receiving certain types of federal funds; temporarily bar from entry into the United States all travelers from seven Muslim-majority countries, including revoking already-granted visas; develop a list of additional countries for similar treatment; suspend for 120 days the entire U.S. refugee program and suspend indefinitely entry for Syrian refugees; develop a list of countries for which the U.S. refugee program will be resumed; and prioritize refugee claims for religious minorities.