

# Warren calls for watchdog investigation into “border wall cronyism”

United States Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and House Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-Miss.) sent a letter to the Acting Inspector General of the Department of Defense (DOD), urging an investigation into the recent decision by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to award a \$569 million no-bid contract to BFBC, a company led by a Republican campaign donor, to build a section of President Trump’s border wall at above-average cost. Their letter asks for an investigation of whether the award of the contract to BFBC subverted federal procurement laws and resulted in taxpayer waste. The IG is already conducting an investigation into a \$400 million contract awarded to Fisher Sand and Gravel (FSG), another company led by a reliable Republican Party donor.

“Particularly now, as we must prioritize funding to save lives and to help the millions of Americans who have suffered severe economic harms as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, taxpayer funds must not be wasted, and Federal procurement processes must not favor campaign donors or personal favorites of the President,” the lawmakers wrote.

BFBC has so far received more than \$1 billion in taxpayer money to build the border wall. In this newest contract, USACE is paying \$33 million per mile of border wall—a price that is more than 50% higher than the \$20 million per-mile average reported in January. This appears to be just the latest in a series of lucrative contracts awarded to Republican donors to build President Trump’s border wall.

“Federal procurement and contracting laws prevent corruption, ensuring that taxpayer funds are spent to hire contractors that can do the job right, do it safely, and do it as inexpensively as possible,” wrote the lawmakers. “The Trump Administration’s decision to award an expensive, no-bid contract for hundreds of millions of dollars to a company favored by the President calls into question the Administration’s compliance with Federal procurement laws and demands a thorough investigation.”

In December 2019, the USACE awarded a \$400 million border wall contract to FSG, a company with a shoddy environmental and tax compliance record, after President Trump and Jared Kushner met privately with the Commanding General of USACE. In response to that award, Rep. Thompson sent a letter to the DOD Principal Deputy Inspector General, asking him to open an investigation. Senator Warren also sent a letter to USACE, asking for details on the solicitation and award of the contract. FSG remains under investigation by the DOD Office of the Inspector General.

Senator Warren has taken numerous steps to oppose President Trump’s border wall. Less than three weeks after President Trump took office, she led colleagues on a letter to the Secretary of Homeland Security raising concerns about the potential diversion of funds from key DHS priorities to pay for the border wall. In February 2020, she introduced the Prioritizing Pandemic Prevention Act (S. 3510), to recoup all of the unobligated funds taken from Pentagon accounts to pay for the wall and redirect them to COVID-19 response. In February 2019, she introduced the Protecting Disaster Relief Funds Act (S. 534), to prevent President Trump from using funds appropriated for disaster relief to fund construction of a border wall. In March 2017, Senator Warren cosponsored a bill (S. 668) to nullify President Trump’s executive order that a border wall be built.

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