

## Why Are We Doing This?

*Tammy Alexander, MCC Washington Office*

“Why are they building the wall?” That was the question I got from 10-year-old Christopher after he heard me speak to the congregation at Iglesia Menonita Rey de Gloria this past Sunday on the environmental impacts of the U.S-Mexico border fence.

Christopher is very perceptive. He had heard me speak about the environmental damage that construction of the fence is causing, how wildlife and public lands are being affected, how U.S. citizens are being cut off from the Rio Grande river, and how ineffective the fence would ultimately be at a cost to taxpayers of tens of billions of dollars. Christopher wanted to know why, if all those things were true, our government was still building the fence.

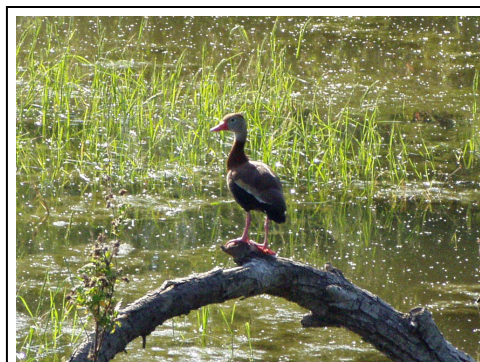
How do you explain politics to a 10-year-old? But Christopher, an immigrant himself, was standing there in front of me and he deserved an answer. So, I tried to explain that many members of Congress want to do something to look tough on immigration. Since they haven’t done much to fix our broken immigration system, they figure that if they build a fence on our border, it will make them look tough to their constituents. They can point to the fence and say, “Look what I’ve done; this fence will make you safer.”

The following day, on April 28, a joint Congressional subcommittee field hearing was held in Brownsville, Texas, to discuss the impacts of the border fence on the environment and on local communities. Two waivers handed down from the Department of Homeland Security on April 1 hastened the need for such a hearing. In one waiver, DHS tossed aside some [36 laws](#) (including the Endangered Species Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act) in order to expedite construction of the fence.

Bishop Raymundo Peña of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brownsville, who testified at the hearing, explained that the wall would be a barrier that separates families, friends, and businesses. Peña also spoke about the impacts to “wildlife areas unique to our Valley, places where all can discover and connect with God’s creation and with one another.”

At the [Sabal Palm Audubon Sanctuary](#) near Brownsville, staff have worked together with Border Patrol for years to craft common sense solutions that dramatically reduced the number of illegal border crossings on the sanctuary while at the same time protecting fragile wildlife habitat. Now, it looks as if Sabal Palms will be affected by construction of the border fence – without consultation or dialogue.

“No fence we can build will be long enough or high enough to wall out the human and economic forces that drive undocumented immigrants into our country,” said Bishop Peña. “Instead of a wall, we need national policies that help overcome the pervasive poverty and deprivation, violence and oppression that push people to leave their own homes.”



Sabal Palm Audubon Sanctuary near Brownsville, TX

[The Mennonite Church USA Churchwide Statement on Immigration](#) asserts that, “Because of our nation’s abundance, because God has called us to welcome the sojourner, and because of the richness that immigrants bring to the Mennonite Church USA, we commit ourselves to action with and on behalf of our immigrant brothers and sisters.”

As members of Congress consider what action to take next on the border fence, and on the broader issues surrounding immigration, I hope they consider these basic Christian principles. And I hope they soberly consider the simple question Christopher asked: Why are we doing this?

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[Contact your Representative and ask him/her to cosponsor H.R. 2076, the Border Security and Responsibility Act 2009.

[H.R. 2076 summary and list of cosponsors](#)

[H.R. 2076 bill text](#)]

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