

# RELIGIOUS LIBERTY V. THE WALL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a controversy over the First Amendment and national security:

Building a wall to protect our borders is a legitimate national security issue, but it should not be done at the expense of religious liberty. To be sure, no right is absolute, and that means that government seizure of church grounds may be acceptable in some very limited instances. But the presumptive right must be the First Amendment right to religious liberty.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is seeking to confiscate property owned by the Diocese of Brownsville to aid in the building of a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Bishop Daniel Flores is protesting the invocation of eminent domain to justify the seizure of approximately 66 acres of land. The property includes La Lomita mission owned by the diocese; it is home to the historic La Lomita Chapel.

"The United States needs immediate possession of the subject property in order to meet this congressional directive," claims the government. Federal officials say they need to take control of the land for a year before they decide whether to take the property for the purpose of constructing a wall.

The Catholic League sides with Bishop Flores. Here's why.

A hearing was scheduled for January to weigh the concerns of the Diocese of Brownsville, but the authorities changed their mind and want to seize the land immediately. They should be denied by court order if necessary. Not to wait for one month to consider the First Amendment implications of this land grab is indefensible.

We appeal to Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen to put the January hearing back on the calendar. There is no need

to hit the panic button, not when it comes to an issue as serious as this one.