Perspectives on Border Realities and Concerns Around Proposed Policy Changes

KEY CONTEXT AT THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

- **Decades of punitive U.S. enforcement (e.g., criminal punishments, barriers that force unauthorized crossing to remote areas, construction of physical barriers, and restrictive legal immigration pathways) have failed to deter large-scale unauthorized migration to the U.S.**
    - A single-minded focus on enforcement ignores both push factors–such as humanitarian risks–driving migrants to leave their homes, and pull factors–like a strong economy and sponsor/family ties–that draw them to the United States.
    - Not even rising numbers of migrant deaths are sufficient to deter people from coming to and crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.
    - Restrictive legal immigration pathways, combined with punitive enforcement, have bolstered and enriched cartels and driven greater human trafficking.
    - Policy proposals that seek to emulate or expand upon these approaches will incur similar failures to achieve their goals.
- **Many migrants arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border seeking to enter the U.S. present real and urgent humanitarian needs. Ignoring them means harming them.**
    - Migrants, particularly women, Black or Indigenous persons, and LGBTQI+ persons, are frequently targets for criminal exploitation and violence in Mexico.
    - Many migrants come with severe or chronic medical conditions requiring care they can only access in the United States.
    - Many vulnerable individuals still fail to qualify for humanitarian exceptions.
        - The belief that our borders are open to anyone and everyone is false.
    - Without strong asylum protections, we abandon those fleeing conflict (such as in Ukraine), failed states like Haiti, or oppression like in China and elsewhere.
- **Our organizations, from our vantage point working on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border at El Paso/Ciudad Juárez, know how challenging it can be to make the border a safe, orderly, and humane space in the face of migration.**
    - In our experience, embracing the work of welcoming people, rather than criminalizing, or expelling them, is the only approach that has or could work.

CORE CONCERNS AROUND PROPOSED CHANGES

- **Proposed changes to the Executive Branch's authority to grant humanitarian parole will be self-defeating and counterproductive.**
    - Parole programs put in place by the Biden Administration, such as those for Ukraine, Afghanistan, and CNHV have worked to help make the border an orderly, safe, and humane place. We should emulate and expand this approach.

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        - Parole leverages executive authority to respond more rapidly and flexibly to changing conditions. Curtailing parole would be a step backward.
    - Reducing legal pathways for migrants to enter the U.S. will drive more persons to enter irregularly between ports of entry and push migratory flows to more remote parts of the border to evade interdiction by U.S. authorities.
        - This will needlessly strain federal resources, making the border more chaotic and harder to manage, which will also further erode public confidence in the government's approach on this issue.
    - Facilitating irregular migration, such as crossing between ports of entry, is an important and growing source of income for cartels.
        - The resources these criminals gain from preying on immigrants who otherwise may have been able to enter through a parole program strengthens their ability to evade/corrupt U.S. and Mexican authorities.
- **Proposed changes to asylum policies will restore the inhumane conditions migrants faced at the U.S.-Mexico border under the Trump Administration.**
    - Migrants seeking safety in the United States, but who would end up stuck in Mexico because of these changes, will be left immensely marginalized and vulnerable, stuck in situations where they are exposed to being preyed upon and exploited by kidnappers and extortionists, sexual predators, and murderers.
    - A heightened credible fear threshold ignores internationally recognized standards, putting migrants at greater risk of being deported to their deaths because of their political views, sexual/gender identity, race, ethnicity, language, indigeneity, or as targets of criminal organizations.
- Proposed additional 'border security' spending will likely fail to meet real needs and challenges facing migrants and American communities alike.
    - More spending on border walls and other barriers is a wasteful investment instead of policies or personnel who could actually improve the situation.

CONCLUSION

As immigration advocacy organizations at the border, we find these proposals unacceptable. We have witnessed first-hand the failure of these restrictions and the chaos that they cause. These restrictions will strain our welcoming process and resources at the border. They will strain resources in our sister city on the Mexican side, and they will put people in danger.

Instead, Congress should advance bipartisan solutions to provide smart resources at the border that make the existing process work better while keeping communities safe. A smart funding package should not expand detention and deportation, but devote funds to supporting a humane immigration system including robust asylum and family reunification pathways that allow access to safety for vulnerable persons in need.