

2022 Border Issues.

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“600 migrants heading north from Honduras in a caravan,” a headline reads. Is this a warning, a sign that we’re about to see another surge of migrants from the Central American countries of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador? On Sunday, January 30, I was in Juárez, Mexico at a migrant shelter and listened to a Honduran couple, Oscar and Maira describe the violence that forced them to flee their country.

Another surge of migrants would surely cause the migration issue to flare up again and once again become a major factor in what we already know will be a brutal and divisive election year.

Here are five suggestions that could help ease this issue and result in solid accomplishments rather than just more partisan rhetoric and anger.

1. Support migrant shelters on both sides of the border and take advantage of the good will of the many volunteers there. With the Biden administration being forced to continue the Remain in Mexico program and push migrants seeking asylum back into dangerous border towns like Juárez, these shelters will not only be needed but they will provide an example of the humane treatment of migrants.

2. Accelerate the asylum hearings for those being forced to wait in Mexico under the Remain in Mexico program. For example, we regularly take food and clothing to the Respettrans migrant shelter near the border bridge in Juárez and many of the migrants have been stuck there for months.
3. The myth that migrants are a major source of the drug trade as well as violence is an argument pushed by those who are opposed to immigration and it must be defused. How? By better utilizing our ports of entry. For example, millions have been spent to upgrade the ports at Palomas and Santa Teresa on New Mexico's border where I cross several times a month and cars coming north to enter the United States are always checked. Why, however, don't the Border Patrol agents there also conduct random spot checks for weapons being smuggled south into Mexico? These thousands of weapons smuggled illegally into Mexico are a major source of the violence there.

And what happened to the legislation sponsored by former New Mexico Congresswoman Xochitl Torres Small to develop better technology to detect drugs being moved north through those ports? All studies show that about 90% of all illegal drugs come into the US via these ports of entry, not via migrants.

4. Ease some of the pressure to cross the border illegally by expanding the guest worker program so that more foreign workers will be able to go back and forth legally as their seasonal work requires. American farmers, construction companies, restaurants and other businesses desperately need these workers. Since the minimum wage per DAY in Mexico is only about \$6.00, less than half the HOURLY minimum wage in most parts of the US, the economic pressure to find work in the US is immense. Give these workers the freedom to move back and forth legally and thus reduce the pressure to enter our country illegally.

Since most of these American businesses are Republican owned, this is an issue that should appeal to Republican legislators.

5. Create a cross-border health program, one that would initially deal with COVID and the need for an accelerated vaccination program on the Mexican side, keeping in mind that Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) continues to be a COVID-sceptic. El Paso medical volunteers who used to hold monthly clinics for families in programs like Siguiendo los Pasos de Jesús (Following the Footsteps of Jesus) in Juárez are no longer going because of concerns about COVID there. Focus a bi-national program on it; If successful, such a program could be expanded to other health issues. There are many doctors in cities like El Paso who would provide free care in specialized cases but they are not going to cross the border to do it.

Time is short. We're about to plunge into what will surely be a brutal and unproductive election cycle. Let's at least try to take some small steps on this vital issue of immigration.

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