



March 31, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

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Dear President Biden,

In the past year, the global COVID-19 pandemic has caused physical, emotional, and economic suffering for tens of thousands of Americans living along the U.S.-Mexico border. Before the pandemic, the economy of border communities relied on the influx of daily travelers from Mexico who acquire goods and services in cities like San Diego, CA, Tucson, AZ, Laredo, TX, McAllen, TX, and Deming, NM. However, travel restrictions put in place to combat the pandemic have dramatically limited these travelers and the critical cross-border exchange of business and commerce, leaving local border economies devastated.

Despite some states' decision to lift mask mandates and allow businesses to operate at capacity, cross-border travel is still limited by federal order to travel deemed "essential" for work, school, medical, and other reasons. This excludes travelers who wish to cross the border to buy goods and services in border communities. These travelers are part of the economic livelihood of our border businesses. The year-long exclusion of these customers is doing severe harm to local economies, especially to the retail, dining, and hospitality sectors.

The USHCC reluctantly accepted temporary limits on non-essential cross-border travel during the height of the pandemic to ensure the safety of border residents. However, the "temporary" limits have now lasted an entire year since March 2020. These restrictions are severely restricting cross-border travel which is not an effective long-term strategy and causes severe economic harm to border communities. We believe it is time for this Administration to remove the current restrictions on travel between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada to allow business travelers to come to the United States to acquire goods and services. Common-sense measures like Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), a negative COVID-19 test, and vaccination proof can make cross-border travel safe for border communities, Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) personnel, and travelers.

The Biden Administration should also take every action possible to safeguard the health and safety of CBP personnel who protect our homeland and citizens. We request that CBP ensure that its personnel are vaccinated and adequately outfitted with PPE to protect the health of our officers, their families, border citizens, and all individuals seeking to cross the U.S. border.

As the crisis of political oppression, crime, and poverty continues in Central America, so does the pressure for Central Americans to leave their homes and seek to enter the United States at the U.S.-Mexico border.



Asylum-seekers requesting protection in the U.S. are protected by federal law that grants asylum to persons who can prove a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. In the last few weeks, we have seen an increase in the number of family units and unaccompanied children who have been allowed to enter the country and continue their quest for asylum.

Approximately, 28 percent of migrants recently apprehended by CBP at the U.S.-Mexico border are families and children who do not attempt to evade detection, but instead present themselves at a port of entry or seek out U.S. authorities to initiate a request for asylum. The remaining 72 percent are single adults who are immediately expelled from the country under Title 42 of the U.S. Immigration Code.

The USHCC strongly advises migrant individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 to follow strict quarantine procedures and socially distance. Some states have provided COVID-19 tests which are being administered by local communities and several non-government organizations who are aiding with quarantine either in shelters or local hotels. Less than six percent of migrants who attempt to cross the border have tested positive for the coronavirus.

The number of migrants in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) holding facilities and the longstanding backlog of cases in immigration courts are troubling. They are evidence of a broken asylum and immigration system that Congress should have fixed decades ago. We urge the Biden Administration and Congress to address this growing problem with well-functioning immigration courts, smart border enforcement, comprehensive immigration reform, innovative technology, and support for local border communities that provide humanitarian assistance to migrants.

The USHCC actively advocates for federal officials to allocate funding for more qualified immigration judges so that asylum and other immigration cases can be adjudicated swiftly and fairly heard. A well-functioning immigration court system will restore order and fairness to our immigration process, preserve the rights of asylum seekers, and deter a wave of migrants from flooding U.S.-Mexico border ports of entry.

We support smart, effective border enforcement and greater investments in personnel, technology and infrastructure at the ports of entry, not false efforts that militarize the border, harming morale, and further damaging the economy of the border region. Smart border enforcement actions should confront border security challenges including drug smuggling, gang activity, human trafficking, and undocumented entry where they are perpetrated at the land ports of entry. Thousands of Border Patrol agents have been hired in recent years, while only a relatively smaller number of CBP officers have been added to the ranks at the ports of entry. These limitations, not only undermine our security, but hamper DHS' ability to expedite vital international commerce.

National security is important; however, it is not the only objective at points of entry. Cross-border commerce is the vitality of the local and national economy. More resources must be devoted, and "trusted traveler" programs implemented, to adequately address inspections, improve the quality of controls, and facilitate the legitimate flow of travel and commerce.



Policymakers make a lot of pronouncements and assumptions on border security, but they rarely consult with border communities. The expertise of border leadership is more critical than ever to the development of appropriate and meaningful border security measures and immigration reform. Involving members of the community in the decision-making process promotes mutual trust and enhances security by encouraging increased cooperation and open information-sharing.

Refugees will continue to come as long as economic and political pressure drives them out of their home countries. Border communities will bear the brunt of receiving refugees until Congress does its elected job and fixes our fractured immigration system. Congress must identify solutions that addresses a common-sense approach to grow our economy through commerce and trade, balances workforce supply and demand, and reforms how asylum seekers are processed into the United States and at our borders.

The USHCC believes that U.S. immigration policies should not ignore the constructive economic role of immigrants that contribute to prosperity and global competitiveness along the U.S.-Mexico and U.S.-Canada borders. We call on Congress to consider an effective guest worker program that will prevent the failures of previous immigration policies. We also urge lawmakers to implement an earned legalization program for the more than estimated 12 million undocumented people who are currently living in the United States. The USHCC is strongly advocating for the passage of the American Dream and Promise Act of 2021 which will ensure a path to citizenship for more than 800,000 DREAMERS who are contributing to America's economic vibrancy.

We appreciate the leadership of our border congressional delegation that has worked tirelessly toward these policy goals. We will continue to collaborate with the Biden Administration, members of Congress, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to achieve immigration and border security outcomes that are worthy of our democracy and country.

Thank you for your service and partnership in supporting America's Hispanic and minority owned businesses as well as the more than 61 million Latinos/as living in America. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to reach out to C. LeRoy Cavazos-Reyna, Vice President of Government and International Affairs via phone at 956-844-9628 or email at LCavazos@ushcc.com. We look forward to a positive response and outcome on this important legislative matter.

Respectfully,

Ramiro A. Cavazos
President and CEO
United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

CC: Majority Leader Charles Schumer, U.S. Senate
Speaker Nancy Pelosi, U.S. House of Representatives
Chairman Raul Ruiz, Congressional Hispanic Caucus
Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, U.S. Department of Homeland Security