



May 11, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House

Dear Mr. President:

The Border Trade Alliance writes to you today to express our growing concern over the migration situation at the United States-Mexico border. The membership of our organization includes U.S. municipalities on the border, as well as private sector firms for whom a well-functioning, efficient, and secure border is essential to their livelihoods.

Border communities – elected leaders, social service providers, and citizens – pay the price for a mismanaged border. No city or county can properly deliver regular core governmental services like public safety, public transportation, and sanitation, while also managing a challenge as complex, wide-reaching, and resource intensive as undocumented immigration. The BTA believes migration is and must remain a federal issue.

Unfortunately, however, a perceived failure to act by the federal government prompts attempts by some elected officials to respond on their own terms, a situation we experienced in Texas last month where the state government undertook duplicative and expensive commercial truck inspections motivated by a stated desire to root out illegal immigration and smuggling.

The BTA strongly opposed the Texas truck inspections, but, regrettably, the potential for non-federal governments to continue to wade into the immigration issue remains present if northward migrant flows continue unabated.

It is against this backdrop that the BTA makes the following recommendations and observations:

- The BTA believes your administration should convey to municipal and private sector leaders in clear terms how it plans to manage migrant flows if Title 42 public health protocols cease next month. This includes assuring leaders and public safety officials that dangerous individuals will not be released from custody and that individuals with COVID-19 will not be released from custody or further strain border area health care providers.
- If the administration remains firm on its plan to bring Title 42 protocols to an end, then we would urge a new set of policies replaces them. Ideally, your administration would work with Congress to give any new policy the stability of having been passed through the regular legislative process. Regardless, the administration should have provisions in place relating to staffing, physical infrastructure, health care, and transportation before lifting Title 42.

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- As the administration anticipates increased migration, please be aware that U.S. land border ports of entry are not equipped to process large volumes of undocumented migrants. Moreover, disruptions at the ports of entry risk interrupting legitimate trade and travel. The Department of Homeland Security must do all it can to reduce such interruptions and assure the trade community that there will be no closures of ports of entry, which we experienced last year in the Del Rio Sector. Port closures are not just inconvenient – they put additional pressures on an already stretched U.S. supply chain and put upward pressure on consumer prices at a time of already high inflation.
- The preparation for increased migrant flows should include staffing considerations. The BTA supports your administration’s call in the fiscal year 2023 budget for 300 additional Border Patrol Coordinators, and we agree with Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas, who testified recently that the additional staff will help Border Patrol agents concentrate on their core mission in the field. The additional staffing assistance is needed now, however. We strongly urge DHS not to divert Customs and Border Protection officers from their current port assignments to Border Patrol support roles; doing so will lead to more supply chain delays and exacerbate inflation.

We acknowledge that the subjects discussed above figure prominently in a memo Secretary Mayorkas distributed to interested parties last month, and we appreciate DHS leaders’ good faith efforts to manage one of the most difficult issues facing this country. The BTA agrees with the Secretary that our outdated immigration system is already under strain and was not built to manage the current levels and types of migratory flows that we are experiencing.

But as residents and leaders of border communities and businesspeople who rely on an efficient and secure border, you can understand the years of frustration that leaves many of us skeptical of government pronouncements that we should anticipate improved results on the border. We hope you will count on the BTA’s years of experience in cross-border affairs as a source to your administration and as a willing partner to ensure that the southern border and our immigration system is humane, secure, properly resourced, and well-managed.

Sincerely,



Sergio Contreras
Chair



Britton Mullen
President

CC: Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas