

Stop hysteria about border wall, El Paso lawmakers say about Trump plan, federal shutdown

Sen. José Rodríguez, Rep. César Blanco, Rep. Joe Moody, Rep. Mary González and Rep. Lina Ortega

January 9, 2019

This statement was issued Tuesday by members of El Paso's state delegation in the Texas Legislature:

AUSTIN — The President will be on live television this evening to explain why he shuttered the government — and may declare a state of emergency — over a border wall. But there is no good explanation. The federal government shutdown is unacceptable and must end. The purported reason for the shutdown does not meet any basic test of sound public policy.

The President is equating the wall, variously, with "national security" and with "border security," sometimes using the terms interchangeably. Immigrants are not a security threat, and we find efforts to paint them in those terms irresponsible and reprehensible. Simply put, the southern border is not a significant entry point for international terrorist organizations. As far as street crime, the Cato Institute found that unauthorized immigrants are 44 percent less likely than natives to be incarcerated, and legal immigrants 69 percent less likely. The federal government has poured unprecedented resources into staffing and equipment at the southern border. In 1992, the Border Patrol had 3,500 agents on the southern border. In 2000, that number was more than doubled to 8,500. Now there are about 20,000 agents. The budget for border enforcement, at more than \$20 billion, is more than the combined budgets of the FBI, Secret Service, US Marshals Service, DEA, and ATF, the law enforcement agencies primarily tasked with fighting national and transnational crime. Meanwhile, apprehensions are at historic lows.

The migrants seeking refuge in the United States are not a danger to us. The rhetoric, sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit, that they bring crime and disease simply has to stop. These lies, said about every wave of immigrants the country has known — said about the Irish, Germans, Italians, Polish, Jewish, Catholics, Chinese, Muslims, and now Mexicans and Central Americans — has led to criminalizing people who we need in this country — risk-takers like the immigrants before them, tough and brave men, women, and children who make the difficult decision to leave their homes and travel thousands of miles across harsh territory for the opportunity to live safe, productive lives.

We need to stop the hysteria about "border security," which has led to militarization of the border and criminalization of unauthorized migrants, and look at the facts. According to a spring 2018 White House fact sheet, ICE was budgeted for \$7.6 billion and CBP for \$13.9 billion, yet the Executive Office for Immigration Review was budgeted at only \$500 million. The hysteria has skewed our national priorities for far too long, predating even this administration, which has

raised it to new levels. It's long past time for a sober look at the topic of "border security" and immigration, and for comprehensive immigration reform that rebalances our approach to conform with reality. Elements of that approach would be:

- To focus less on "boots on the ground" and walls, and more on law enforcement that targets true threats such as cartels that traffic people against their will and use extreme violence to maintain a grip on the illegal trade of drugs and other commodities;
- A path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants who are here, usually as part of a "blended" family that includes citizens;
- More guest worker visas for agriculture and other labor-intensive fields;
- More resources to 1) vet immigrants to reduce backlog and wait time for citizenship applications and 2) to humanely process the current influx of asylum seekers;
- A hemispheric strategy to reduce the "push factors" that are leading migrants, currently mostly from

Central America, to seek sanctuary in the United States;

- Investment in our ports of entry, to increase safe and efficient passage of the 1 million daily travelers and \$536 billion in annual trade with Mexico that supports millions of U.S. jobs.

A wall will violate the private property rights of Americans, be prohibitively expensive, and be ineffective. The only return on investment is political, and it sends a signal to the rest of the world that America is no longer the beacon of hope for the tired and poor, who given the opportunity in our country become exceptional, as did our parents and grandparents.

There is a crisis, but it originates in Washington D.C. The President and those who are enabling him are doing great damage. End this now.

El Paso's state delegation is made up of Democratic state Sen. José Rodríguez and Democratic state Reps. César Blanco, Joe Moody, Mary González and Lina Ortega.