

Editorial: It's time for Congress, not the White House, to step up and protect Arizona's economy

January 1, 2019

We have a request for Tom O'Halleran, our member of the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as our two new U.S. Senators, Kyrsten Sinema and Martha McSally, and new(ish) U.S. Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick:

Would you please explain to President Trump just how much Arizona makes from trade with Mexico?

This government shutdown over a border wall is ridiculous, and the constant attacks on Mexico aren't doing our state any favors.

Firstly, about the wall — if, as Trump says, he wants it to keep out illegal drugs from coming into the United States, one of you please explain to him that almost all the drugs are smuggled in through legal ports of entry. The same with human smuggling.

McSally especially should know this, since she was a member of the U.S. House representing Cochise County, which sits on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Trump also claims the wall will keep out criminals, which he says is especially important since most violent crime is committed by illegal aliens. Except . . . it's not.

In 2018, the Cato Institute published a study using Texas court data that showed that native-born Americans were more than three times likely to be convicted of any crime than an illegal alien, convicted of homicide at a 4-3 rate over illegal aliens and were five times more often convicted of larceny than illegal aliens.

In other words, you're way more likely to be the victim of a crime at the hands of an American citizen than at the hands of an illegal alien.

By the way, legal immigrants committed almost no crime, being convicted of crimes at 85 percent below the native-born rate.

Oh, and most illegal immigrants make their way to this country by overstaying their visas, not by hiking across the Arizona desert, again making a wall unnecessary.

We're not saying you all shouldn't be working on improved border security — at both the southern and northern borders, please, since Canadians are more likely to overstay a visa than any other country. In fact, the Pew Research Center reports that illegal immigration from Mexico has been in decline each year since 2007.

In another by the way, that same study found Arizona's illegal immigrant population declined by 220,000 between 2007 and 2016, while we are, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the fourth-fastest-growing state in the nation. Which kind of blows a hole in the president's theory we're being overrun.

But let's get back to trade, since the president fancies himself the finest dealmaker in the world. Would you please inform him that Arizona does more than \$15 billion in business with Mexico — exporting \$7.5 billion in goods and services while importing \$7.9 billion?

That's just too much money to toss away to keep a campaign pledge that had no basis in reality to begin with ("Mexico will pay for the wall").

While we may beat on Gov. Doug Ducey for his unwillingness to look anywhere other than Maricopa County when it comes to economic development initiatives, we have to give him credit when it comes to working with his Mexican counterparts on trade.

Ducey has done yeoman's work in ensuring Arizona and the Mexican states have a good working relationship, and we'd hate to see that work relegated to the scrap heap by someone who doesn't understand the basics of immigration policy.

So please, senators and representatives, do your best to convince Trump that his current path is one of folly and could damage the people of Arizona. And, failing that, please work across the aisle to enact veto-proof legislation that will ensure border security while maintaining Arizona's economic health.