

EL PASO INC.

El Paso responds to Trump spokeswoman

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National politics reached El Paso in the form of a 25-word tweet by President Donald Trump's spokeswoman supporting construction of the proposed \$18 billion border wall.

In a tweet last Monday, press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders linked to a Jan. 13 opinion piece in the New York Post that argued El Paso's safety could be attributed to an existing border fence constructed during George W. Bush's presidency.

"Ask El Paso, Texas (now one of America's safest cities) across the border from Juárez, Mexico (one of the world's most dangerous) if a wall works," Sanders wrote.

El Paso civic and business leaders, who often tout the Sun City's relative safety among large U.S. cities, responded quickly to the assumption that the fence was the reason for low crime rates.

"Long before the fence was constructed, El Paso was still among the safest cities in America," Jon Barela, CEO of the Borderplex Alliance, told El Paso Inc. "We boast that distinction because we are blessed with great people, a wonderful culture and hard-working law enforcement officials."

U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke responded with a tweet of his own.

"Walls have nothing to do with it. We've been ranked 1st, 2nd or 3d safest city for the last 20 years, including before any wall," he tweeted. "In addition to great law enforcement, our safety is connected to the fact that we are a city of immigrants. We treat each other with respect and dignity."

The New York Post article was written by Paul Sperry, a conservative author and political commentator. He's known for a book he co-authored called "Muslim Mafia" and the "Great American Bank Robbery."

Sperry compiled Department of Homeland Security data for El Paso that show a decline in illegal crossings from 2006 to 2017, which he correlates to a dip in crime.

"And crime abated with the reduced human traffic from Juárez, considered one of the most dangerous places in the world due to drug-cartel violence, helping El Paso become one of the safest large cities in America," he wrote.

Sperry also argues that federal data show that violent crime and drug smuggling spilled into El Paso from Juárez in 2010.

“It’s not surprising but it continues to baffle me how it seems that the further away you are from our border, the more of an expert these people seem to think they are,” Barela said. “Those of us who are born and raised in this region know otherwise.”

Studies released last year by The Sentencing Project, a criminal justice research and advocacy group, and the libertarian Cato Institute, found that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than people born in the United States.

El Paso, which has a large immigrant community, has been a safe city for years because of the relationship between residents and law enforcement, said Fernando Garcia, executive director of the Border Network for Human Rights, an immigration advocacy group in El Paso.

“For immigrant communities, they know they can call the sheriff and police, knowing they won’t be asked about their immigration status,” he said.

Business leaders in El Paso and Juárez have called for increased investment in the ports of entry. Leaders argue investments at the ports of entry would help U.S. Customs and Border Protection detect harmful drugs and speed up crossings for commercial vehicles.

Juárez’s bulging maquiladora industry supports El Paso jobs, and local business leaders have long advocated for speeding border trade, saying it supports jobs across the country.

“We create jobs for each other,” said Jose Arturo Ramos, director of Juárez’s binational affairs office in El Paso. “The manufacturing industry has 352 plants, and 90 are for fortune 500 companies and create a lot of goods that Canada and Mexico produce and the U.S. benefits from.”