

Trump, Texas Legislature focus on fear not opportunities

José Rodríguez, Joseph Moody, Mary Gonzalez, Cesar Blanco and Lina Ortega

January 12, 2019

The president visited South Texas on Thursday to further explain why he shuttered the government — and may declare a state of emergency — over a border wall. It was nothing more than a campaign stop. It is unfortunate the president is using Texas as a backdrop for his campaign, and more so that some in Texas are participating. But there is no good explanation for his actions. 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, and unfortunately state leaders, are 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.

Further, as shown in a study by the Perryman Group, "they held 1.2 million jobs in Texas, about 11.5 percent of the private-sector workforce in 2015. They paid over \$13 billion in total taxes and generated almost \$145 billion in gross product."

Unfortunately, the Texas Legislature also has opted to focus on the fears instead of the opportunities. The Legislature has appropriated billions for "border security" in recent sessions, with no discernible results in crime reduction, reduced drug availability, or even immigrant flows. The latter began dropping long before the expenditures and has stayed at historical lows, with the specific exception of Central American migrants who are being pushed from their home countries because of climate change, crime, and political instability.

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, including those in Texas, are doing great damage. End this now.