

Senate Candidates at CO Hispanic Republicans Forum Support Building Trump's Wall and 'Legal' Immigration

By Sean Price

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In Denver last night Republican candidates hoping to unseat U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO) addressed immigration at a candidate forum hosted by [Colorado Hispanic Republicans](#).

The candidates at the event were former El Paso County GOP chair Eli Bremer, former radio host Deborah Flora, Colorado Christian University professor Gregory Moore, former Fort Collins City Councilmember Gino Campana, Colorado state Rep. Ron Hanks (R-Cañon City), and retired Pueblo resident Dan Hendricks.

The event was moderated by Kim Monson, a radio host for Colorado's KLZ 560 AM station. One of the questions Monson asked the candidates centered around immigration. All of the candidates signaled support for completing the construction of a border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, a move championed by Donald Trump.

"Despite what some might think, not all immigrants are Hispanic," Monson said. "They come from all over the world including from terrorist countries. Tell us your plan to address current immigration policies and the issues caused by the Biden/Bennet open border policy."

Read the responses to Monson's question from each candidate below.

Hanks:

"I've said it before: finish the wall. When we do, we re-empower the border patrol to make arrests. I was down there in 2018 and I talked with the border patrol down at the southern border and looked at every port of entry. I did it again in 2021 when I went down [for] the Arizona audit. Border patrol was much more reticent. They did not want to talk. They had been shut down and they lost their mission. Here's what I would say: we've got the iron already on site. Re-empower ICE and we have to have people return to Mexico."

Hanks is referring to the at least \$250 million of unused steel intended for Trump's border wall that is currently being stored in New Mexico and Arizona.

Campana:

“As a first-generation American I am the strongest supporter of legal immigration, for people to come here legally like my parents did. But I’ll be the strongest opponent of illegal immigration. Secure the border. Stay in your country until your paperwork has been processed and then come to our country because you want to be an American. You may have cultural traditions you want to preserve but come here because you want to live the American dream. And we’ve got the steel sitting there. We can put it to work. But rather, we’re paying the contractor \$2 billion to watch that steel sitting there while Texas has to pay for the wall itself. I’m sure you’re like me, where you’re sitting watching stuff like this on TV and you scratch your head like, ‘What are these guys thinking?’ And they cloak it in compassion. I don’t think its compassionate to allow somebody to cross our border illegally and be stuck in limbo.”

Campana’s argument that undocumented immigrants should just immigrate legally will be repeated by other candidates in their answers.

Telling immigrants to “immigrate legally” or to “just wait in line” is a common Republican talking point. However, the argument misrepresents how the U.S. immigration system works, as often there is no “line” available for undocumented immigrants. Last October, the American Immigration Council, an immigrant advocacy and research group, released a fact sheet that goes into more detail about the matter.

Flora:

“When we look at the border there are two things happening. One is a humanitarian disaster. When there are women and children being trapped under bridges that needs to stop. Those who are coming with ill intent we have to stop because they are turning Colorado into the drug distribution capital of America. It’s coming straight up I-25 and straight up I-70. In addition, when you have one of the border patrol chiefs saying that last year they stopped more people on the terrorist watch list than any other year, we stop there. Then we have immigration reform after we secure our border.”

While some immigrants who cross the U.S.-Mexico border are criminals or hoping to traffic drugs it should be noted, according to the CATO Institute, a Libertarian think tank, that 77% of drug traffickers are U.S. citizens, not undocumented immigrants. The myth of the criminal immigrant is one that is often used by politicians to push border policy agendas.

Moore:

“The Democrats have very successfully weaponized this issue. They’ve made Republicans look like the anti-Hispanic party and the anti-immigration party. So, we need to do a better job of our messaging. That’s one of the reasons we’re having this meeting tonight, I think, is to have this conversation. We do need the wall. We need to do a better job of messaging that we are not anti-immigrant but that we are pro-law and order. We should end DACA not because we’re against Hispanics or immigrants but because it rewards bad behavior and it’s bad policy. And one other thing: we should not separate children from their

parents. Obama did do it first and Trump continued it. That was a mistake. Parental rights are important, even for illegal immigrants.”

DACA refers to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a U.S. immigration policy enacted by Barack Obama that allows an opportunity for some undocumented people in the U.S. to get a legal work permit. DACA is currently inactive due to U.S. Supreme and Circuit Court rulings, barring any new applications to the program. DACA is still valid for current recipients, however, and applications for renewals are still being accepted.

DACA has been lauded by immigration groups as a success, increasing wages and opportunities for undocumented individuals and their communities in the U.S.

Hendricks:

“I just want to say I concur with 90% of what I’ve heard up here again. But I want to add, and I am a very firm believer in this: I want every American to speak English. I’m sick and tired of having to hear, ‘¿Español, no español?’ ‘No, I’m sorry I don’t speak Spanish. I’m German Catholic. I want you to speak English, or no more special rights for you. I want the sheriffs to pick you up if you don’t have a passport. I want them to put you on an airplane and fly you back to your own country. You can come through the port.”

This is a racist statement. After Hendricks finished speaking he was met with applause from the forum crowd. Listen to the audio below:

This is the first time Hendricks, a fringe candidate, has participated in a candidate forum of this sort. Through most of the event Hendricks did not answer the questions asked by Monson, instead choosing to either talk about something else or read aloud sections from various reading materials he brought on stage. In the second half of the event he got closer to answering the moderator’s questions but would often lose coherency during his response.

Bremer:

“Three things: build the wall, remain in Mexico, enforce the law. But once we do that we have to sit down and say, ‘What is our immigration policy in America?’ We haven’t had a policy in as long as I can remember. We need people to come here legally. My father-in-law is a pecan farmer down in Georgia. They can’t find Americans to work his crops down there. We need people to come in legally. He hires people who come in legally every year. They pay their taxes. So we need that. It’s time for us to look Democrats in the eyes, look voters in the eyes, and say, ‘It’s time for us to actually have an immigration policy and we need one that puts Americans first.”

After the forum, the *Colorado Times Recorder* caught up with Bremer, Hanks, and Campana to discuss the specifics of their respective stances on immigration.

In Colorado, undocumented people can obtain a driver’s license under the Colorado Road and Community Safety Act. When asked what he thought about the Colorado law Hanks said he was not a fan.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Hanks said. “If they’re undocumented they’re not supposed to be here and we have a process that’s failing. So we’re compounding our problems here in my estimation.”

Bremer said that since he is running for U.S. Senate, he would only address laws that were in place at the federal level.

Campana, however, was clear about his stance in response to the Colorado law allowing undocumented immigrants or temporary residents to get a driver’s license.

“No entity of government should be providing benefits to people illegally present in the U.S.,” Campana said.

Undocumented students in Colorado are eligible for in-state tuition and financial aid from public universities under the state’s ASSET Program. Campana was similarly clear in his response to that program.

“No entity of government, including taxpayer-funded universities, should provide a benefit, such as in-state tuition, to people illegally present in the U.S.,” Campana said.

Hanks also said he did not support the program.

“That doesn’t make sense to me either,” Hanks said. “It’s a nice feel-good idea until you break it down and pursue it from a logic standpoint. We have Americans who are paying more than people who are not here lawfully. It doesn’t make sense. So, no, I don’t support that.”

When asked whether he would support a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients, something immigration advocacy groups in Colorado have pushed for over the past several years, Bremer said he would look forward to negotiating with people on all sides of the issue.

“I would sit down and talk with people on all sides and say, ‘What deal can we create?’ ... I fault both Republicans and Democrats for not sitting down and working to actually solve the problem,” Bremer said. “I think right now the main problem is we don’t have an immigration policy to begin with. So that doesn’t mean Republicans are going to get 100% of what they want. It doesn’t mean Democrats are going to get 100% of what they want. But I think it is time for us to come to the table and actually form an immigration policy that works for America.”

After being asked what specifically he would want to see in that policy, Bremer said it should be dependent on the workers most needed by U.S. companies.

“I think we should decide who gets in largely on the basis of what America needs,” Bremer said. “And there’s not just one section of the economy where we need people. We need people to be low-skilled laborers, we need them for our farms, we need them for our manufacturing. We also need high-skilled people through the H-1B visa program. What we don’t need right now is a happenstance policy, a very inefficient policy that doesn’t seem fair or well-organized and doesn’t take into account what we need in America.”

Hanks admitted a DACA pathway to citizenship is a nuanced issue.

“Well they’ve been here for a while, haven’t they? That becomes a tricky issue,” Hanks said. “First thing we ought to do is clarify that I am a big fan of legal immigration. But we are jamming people up. I know people who are fifteen years on the list. What have these DACA people done to those people’s chances and wait time? It’s wrong. It’s flat wrong. And to offer those people any type of consolation prize is also wrong. We’re going to end up having one heck of a bureaucracy to sit here and work through this case by case. I hate to adjudicate people’s lives like that but the reality is we should not have had people coming in illegally.”

To be clear, DACA recipients are not causing the immigration system, already bloated and inefficient for a variety of reasons, to process incoming citizens more slowly.

Campana wanted to emphasize that DACA has been paused due to court rulings.

“DACA was unlawful when established by Obama, held to be illegal by a federal court, and DHS admits its illegality on its website,” Campana said. “DACA should not be the starting point of a pathway to legal status. For those who arrived as children, and have become productive, otherwise law-abiding members of our communities, I could consider a path to legal status. After they have legal status they can apply for citizenship through the proper process but do not get to cut the line of those who are already going through the process legally.”

Lastly, Hanks said he did not understand immigration lottery systems, which the U.S. does employ for some visas.

“I’m a big fan of legal immigration,” Hanks said. “I’ve worked at embassies in my military career. I support it. They have some ridiculous concepts like lotteries. I think that’s kind of a dumb way to get citizenship. It’s like having Governor Polis do the vaccine lottery. I don’t think it’s right to take a job for the chance to win a million bucks. Why is the Government doing something like that?”

Campana concluded by explaining why Joe Biden and U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas should be criticized for the situation at the U.S.-Mexico border.

“Biden and Mayorkas have deliberately weakened border security,” Campana said. “We must establish true border security to protect Americans from crime, including the flow of deadly drugs. I support safe, orderly, and legal migration. I want to prevent unsafe, disorderly, and illegal migration.”

Each of the other candidates during the forum included critiques of Biden while linking Biden and Bennet to each other. Bennet is one of fifteen U.S. Senators — all members of the Democratic Party — who have supported 100% of measures supported by Biden.

Other than immigration, the other questions at the forum focused on inflation, crime rates, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and oil and gas development in Colorado. Candidates attacked Biden for his role in all of these issues, particularly on immigration.

Since his election, Joe Biden has been targeted by a media narrative that he has a border crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border. A 2021 report by the Pew Research Center found that among

mainstream media outlets, immigration was a top focus of coverage of Biden's early days as president, and the coverage was mostly negative.

In fact, a January article from *The Intercept* and a report from the U.S. Census Bureau indicated that the concerns over a "border crisis" were overblown and misinformed by the media and Biden's political critics. The Census Bureau report found that net international migration into the United States increased by just 247,000 people in 2021, the lowest annual level for any year since at least 2010.

Although Biden has reversed some Trump-era immigration policies, many are still in place and some are being expanded. In December, Biden even reinstated the "Remain in Mexico" policy after initially suspending it.

Also, a September report from the CATO Institute found that Biden's border policy is not "open borders," and is in fact attempting to let in as few immigrants as possible.

While Biden did try to include some form of immigration reform in his proposed Build Back Better stimulus package, some immigration advocates are frustrated with the President for his lack of action.

The forum was attended by some notable Colorado Republicans including state GOP Chair Kristi Burton Brown, Advance Colorado Institute president Michael Fields, former U.S. Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-CO) (who endorsed Campana for U.S. Senate), Gubernatorial candidate Greg Lopez, and QAnon supporter and former school board candidate Schumé Navarro. There were roughly 150 people total in attendance.