

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3102

May 24, 2021

Vice President Kamala Harris
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Vice President Harris,

It is my understanding you plan to travel to Mexico and Guatemala on June 7 and 8. Although you have yet to visit our nation's own southern border, you intend to visit these countries to discuss the "root causes" of illegal immigration. While the administration has identified the goal of funding economic development for Central America to curb the current surge, nearly 9.8 million Americans remain unemployed, inflation is rising sharply, and gas prices are skyrocketing.¹ The economic hardship many Americans continue to face is due in large part to nonsensical COVID-19 restrictions your administration supports. Opening our borders to unfettered and unchecked illegal immigration will only exacerbate many of the problems experienced in our border communities and across the country.

I respectfully request you consider the following actions that are essential to protect national security and the safety of our citizens. First, I invite you to join me at the southern border of New Mexico to see the crisis firsthand and how it is affecting Americans in my district who continue to fear violence and property damage along the border. Further, I believe it is imperative that your discussions with the Governments of Mexico and Central American countries include members of Congress, especially those members from border communities and those on both sides of the aisle. This crisis can only be solved with bipartisan input and perspective from those who represent areas along the southern border. I would be pleased to host you in New Mexico's Second District as well as join you on your trip to Mexico and Guatemala to bring firsthand knowledge of what the border crisis means for those who live there and are affected daily.

Additionally, I would like to draw your attention to academic and practical experience that use of foreign aid to address the "root causes" of illegal immigration has shown little effectiveness. While foreign aid is warranted in some cases to advance American national interests, foreign aid to stop illegal immigration has never been shown to work to decrease, and in some cases actually

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021, May 7). The Employment Situation April 2021.

<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>;

Mutikani, L. (2021, May 12). *U.S. consumer prices post largest gain since 2009 as inflation ramps up*. Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/us-consumer-prices-surge-april-2021-05-12/>.

increases, illegal immigration. According to scholars at the Center for Global Development and Princeton University, “Today the evidence that aid can greatly and sustainably deter emigration from poor countries is weak at best... Aid flows may have a positive effect on economic growth—though this remains controversial—but more importantly, economic growth has historically raised emigration in almost all developing countries.”² It is therefore likely the influx of \$4 billion in aid to Central America proposed by your administration will actually exacerbate our border crisis. It should also be noted that the Government Accountability Office has found one form of USAID aid designed to address illegal immigration reintegration has not yet been assessed for effectiveness.³ In many cases, aid touted to address illegal immigration does not have as one of its metrics for success whether it reduces illegal immigration at all.⁴ In light of your administration’s massive spending, the American people cannot afford to waste even more money. Moreover, public statements and policies from officials within the Biden administration signal to those across the world that America’s borders are effectively open, and key incentives exist that will continue fueling this crisis. Steps must be taken immediately to change course.

The most effective way to stop illegal immigration is to ensure consequences for those who break our laws or exploit our asylum system. Scholars at the Institute for Defense Analyses found that the “number of Mexican immigrants attempting to enter the United States illegally dropped sharply after the Border Patrol rolled out the Consequence Delivery System in 2008–12.”⁵ Further confirming the importance of consequences is that “the impact of sanctions is also evident in surveys of apprehended Mexican nationals. In 2007, 88 percent said they intended to attempt another border crossing within three months. That figure fell to 77 percent in 2009 and 49 percent in 2013.”⁶ This points to the fact that the only effective means of controlling illegal immigration is strong border security measures including more Border Patrol agents, physical infrastructure like a wall, and a consequence delivery system that deports, punishes, and discourages migrants from illegally entering our nation or making frivolous asylum claims while encouraging migrants to seek legal means of entry. This will mean changes to our current asylum adjudication system, credible fear standard, and how we deal with unaccompanied alien children from noncontiguous countries.

The good news is that under the Trump administration we had willing partners in Central America and Mexico. All three of the Northern Triangle Countries and Mexico worked hard to help reduce the flow of illegal immigration to the United States. My hope is that you will consider reinstating the Migrant Protection Protocols and Asylum Cooperation Agreements that helped dramatically reduce the flow of illegal immigration. These initiatives must be reinstated to regain control of our border. Also, it is imperative that Title 42 restrictions remain in place as

² Clemens, M. A., & Postel, H. M. (2018). Deterring Emigration with Foreign Aid: An Overview of Evidence from Low-Income Countries. *Population and Development Review*, 44(4), 667–693. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12184>

³ U. S. G. A. (2018). Central America: USAID Assists Migrants Returning to their Home Countries, but Effectiveness of Reintegration Efforts Remains to Be Determined. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-62>.

⁴ Staff Briefing with GAO.

⁵ Maas, S. (2018, November). *Sanctions Program Reduces Illegal Entries into the United States*. NBER. <https://www.nber.org/digest/nov18/sanctions-program-reduces-illegal-entries-united-states>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

COVID-19 continues to ravage Mexico and Central America. It is vital that you finish the unfinished border barrier system, especially gaps like those in my district that I recently toured with the House Oversight and Reform Committee. I am more than willing to make all these points on the trip to Guatemala and Mexico.

Thank you for your attention to this letter. I look forward to your response and traveling with you to the southern border in New Mexico and to Guatemala and Mexico.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Yvette Herrell", written in a cursive style.

Yvette Herrell

Member of Congress