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December 16, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

President Biden:

I am writing to express my ongoing concerns over border security along the Southwest border in Arizona. For decades, Arizonans have known all too well what it means to have Washington fail on border security and immigration policy. The community in Yuma, Arizona, has faced challenges over the past several weeks due to increased migrant numbers, which highlights the importance of developing a smart and effective approach to migration influxes at the border. The border barrier in Yuma contains an obvious short gap that presents security concerns and puts a strain on the U.S. Border Patrol.

Arizona needs a smart, data-driven approach to border security, informed by an analysis of the situation on the ground. This includes advanced technology and additional staffing, upgrading ports of entry, and fencing and barriers where they make sense and can be effective. As you know, the previous administration began border wall construction projects along the Southwest border, including in many areas of Arizona. Following the halt to these construction contracts, in 2021, a GAO report<sup>1</sup> found that the Border Security Improvement Plan (BSIP) did not provide sufficient strategic analysis of border wall construction plans and was woefully inadequate in assessing the true impact of the plan in securing the border and protecting our communities. Proper analysis of border security impact and mitigation strategies for these areas were never completed before construction.

After the halt to border wall construction, Arizona was left both with areas in need of remediation and repair, like those near Guadalupe Canyon where natural barriers have been destroyed and create risk to private property and livestock, and areas where there are gaps between sections of the barrier that create security risks to border communities. For example, in Yuma, Arizona, Border Patrol is encountering larger groups of migrants entering the United States through a gap in the border fence near the Morelos Dam, which has been dubbed "The Gap."<sup>2</sup> The Yuma Sector is in the southwest corner of Arizona and contains approximately 181,670 square miles of primarily desert terrain between California and Arizona. The area consists of vast open

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<sup>1</sup> GAO, Border Security: Assessment of the Department of Homeland Security's Border Security Improvement Plan, GAO-21-303R, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-303r>, April 12, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Migrants walk across the Colorado River from the Mexican border town of Los Algodones.

deserts, rocky mountain ranges, large drifting sand dunes and the Colorado River. The border stretch in the Yuma Sector is 126 miles long and the gaps in the fencing create funnels for border crossings. Indeed, that is why The Gap has become well known—it is a popular location for border crossings. I have seen this gap myself and been briefed on it by the Yuma Sector Border Patrol.

In conversations with Yuma Mayor Doug Nicholls, County Supervisor Jonathan Lines, and Sheriff Leon Wilmot, I heard first-hand that this most recent influx in the Yuma Sector has strained border patrol and community resources. Following my request, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has sent additional agents to Yuma to address the current crisis. I appreciate those additional resources, however, more must be done to mitigate the current and future influxes, and ensure a more safe, humane and orderly process.

I have also spoken with leaders at the Yuma Regional Medical Center, the only hospital in this border county, and learned that the hospital is overwhelmed due to the number of migrants in need of care for both acute and chronic conditions. This strain on resources places an even greater burden on the health care providers and community as they brace for increased numbers of COVID-19 patients and the seasonal population increase with both winter visitors and the agriculture growing season. The administration should make additional efforts to help Yuma and other communities mitigate the impacts of these high migration levels.

We need a smart and effective approach to border security that considers the need for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel, advanced technology, as well as fencing and barriers where they make sense. I ask that your Administration make improvements as needed, such as closing fencing gaps in areas like the Morelos Dam, installing lights and sensors, and other appropriate measures to assist Border Patrol agents in securing the border while also respecting the property and privacy rights of Arizonans.

Your Administration must make it a priority to address these issues. It is critical that gaps in barriers are assessed and either filled or secured with technology and staffing support. It is also important that border communities with areas damaged by construction be remediated and restored. Arizona deserves better from Washington on the border.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Mark Kelly  
United States Senator

Cc: Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas