

Jobs, Security and Mobility—Beyond Merida in the Paso Del Norte

On March 23, 2010 in Mexico City, the U.S. and Mexico launched the foundation of a 21st century bilateral partnership called "[The New Border Vision](#)." After months of consultation with the Calderon administration and joined by Secretaries Gates and Napolitano, [Secretary of State Clinton announced a new policy named "Beyond Merida."](#) The new federal accord has four key policy pillars: disrupt capacity of organized crime to operate; institutionalize capacity to sustain rule of law; create a 21st century border structure; and build strong and resilient communities. Here in the "Pass of the North," *Beyond Merida* must mean safety, jobs and mobility.

Secretary Clinton's announcement was preceded by more than 80 hours of meetings that I and other members of the ten-state Border Legislative Conference had in Mexico City with Mexico's Attorney General, Senate leaders, federal agency chiefs and high-ranking U.S. embassy officials. As the Texas Senator from El Paso, with more than a decade on the Senate Transportation and Homeland Security Committee and as past chair of the BLC, our office played a key role in the historic rewrite of U.S.-Mexico policies now underway.

The U.S.-Mexico border today is the tale of two cities. On the Mexican side, Ciudad Juarez is the epicenter of historic, cartel-related violence in Mexico. [In 2009, more than 2,600 slayings happened in Juarez.](#) With [more than 6,000 murders since January 2008](#), Juarez is now the murder capital of the world. In striking contrast, [based on FBI statistics for 2009, the four lowest rates for violent crime among U.S. cities with at least 500,000 residents were San Diego, Phoenix, El Paso and Austin—all cities in border states.](#) Here in El Paso, just across the border from Ciudad Juarez, there have been [just two murders this year](#), neither related to drugs. In fact, [El Paso is the second safest city in the United States.](#)

During the past 10 years, the overwhelming emphasis in U.S. immigration policy has been on border enforcement, primarily on the U.S.-Mexican border. The U.S. Congress has more than tripled spending for border enforcement activities since 1993. The number of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents on the border has [increased from about 15,000 to 17,000 during the Bush administration to more than 26,000 today.](#) Last month, [the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate both passed bills to provide another \\$600 million dollars for an additional 1,500 civilian border agents.](#) As a bridging mechanism until personnel can be hired and trained, [President Obama has deployed 1,200 National Guard troops to the border](#) for one year.

As a result of these collective efforts, border crossings by undocumented immigrants have declined sharply over the past decade. Along the border with Mexico, [apprehensions of would-be immigrants have dropped from a peak of 1.8 million in 2000 to 556,000 in 2009](#)—a 31 percent decrease.

So, contrary to heated election year claims, the nation's Southwest border is safer than it has been in many years, and the number of undocumented immigrants crossing the border has declined sharply. Yet, today, immigrants from Mexico and Latin America are the targets of prejudice and discrimination in numerous states across the nation. State and local initiatives, like [Arizona's Senate Bill 1070](#), target immigrant families and their children; these initiatives are

disappointing and dangerous. Recent [election year claims of "beheadings in the desert"](#) and ["car bombings in El Paso"](#) are not only false, but dangerous fictions that damage real solutions to real challenges. Unless the U.S. and Mexico deal with [pandemic violence that Secretary of State Clinton now calls "an insurgency,"](#) American, Mexican and other international manufacturers will choose to save on the increasing security and mobility costs associated with doing business in such an unstable, violent environment and will relocate to places where these costs are not part of the ordinary costs of production.

What our region must do is make the case on why the economic powerhouse and world-class logistics of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands matter to all other states—in the U.S. and Mexico. Today, [Texas trades more with Mexico than all the European Union combined.](#) Cross-border trade in the U.S.-Mexico border region [trade surpasses \\$1 billion a day.](#) In fact, [20 percent of NAFTA manufacturing output is from the Juarez/El Paso/Southern New Mexico region.](#) Simply put, losing the manufacturing sector in Juarez will affect jobs all across the Americas.

In Northern Mexico, [more than 1 million Mexicans work in maquiladoras.](#) About 3,000 maquiladoras manufacture and export products for the United States and other countries. Alarming, a recent survey by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce found that as many as 27 percent of its members are considering removing their investments in Mexico due to growing security concerns. Another study by the International Trade Administration at the U.S. Department of Commerce found that [congestion results in an average economic output loss of \\$116 million per minute of delay. In 2008, these delays cost the U.S. economy nearly 26,000 jobs, \\$6 billion in output, \\$1.4 billion in wages, and \\$600 million in tax revenue annually.](#)

Increasingly, policymakers are realizing that the "blunt force" security focus of the last eight years has shut down secure, lawful manufacturing by the 3,500 Fortune 500 companies doing business in the ten American and Mexican border states; hamstrung North American manufacturing competitiveness; slowed mobility and accelerated the loss of North American jobs. [The Maquiladora Association of Juarez recently reported that nearly one billion dollars did not come to the city due to this climate of insecurity and uncertainty; these resources would have generated 70,000 to 80,000 jobs.](#) The Association also reported that maquiladora employment decreased from 249,837 workers in January 2008 to 166,454 by June 2009. This translates to a net job loss of 83,000 jobs over 18 months. In addition, the recession in the U.S. has contracted segments of the manufacturing market. It is worth noting that approximately [2,000 El Pasoans work in Juarez maquiladoras in professional and management positions, and more than 66,000 El Paso jobs are linked to the Juarez economy.](#)

The economic future of Mexico is increasingly dependent on trade, especially in manufacturing. The top three sources of Mexico's external revenues—oil, tourism, and remittances—are declining. [Without Gulf deep drilling, some economists estimate that Mexico will run out of oil within just seven years,](#) making Mexico a net importer for the first time in a century. [In late 2009, remittances, which represent the second-largest source of income for Mexico, dropped to their lowest level since 2005.](#) In addition, due to the H1N1 flu outbreak and cartel-related violence, tourism—[the third-largest source of revenue](#)—fell 11.4 percent in 2009. So while jobs are growing in El Paso as a result of the new medical school and Fort Bliss, jobs are leaving Juarez due to violence and the increasing costs of production.

What can our leaders, our institutions, our federal/state/local governments, and most importantly, our 2.4 million people do to solve the economic challenges facing the U.S.-Mexico border today?

To create jobs in a highly global, highly competitive world, we need to make the U.S.-Mexico border safer, faster and smarter so that people, ideas, services and products can move more efficiently with greater speed and safety, less cost and more value than our competitors. Our value in the world is based on our educated workforce and an enviable logistic platform in the world's most economically valuable hemisphere. If we are safer, faster and smarter, then we will continue to be the most valuable place in all of the Americas.

Just like the city of Medellin in Colombia, Juarez can also make the transition from fear to hope. Step one is taking back the streets. Step two is establishing an effective rule of law from arrest to incarceration. Steps three and four are providing opportunities to those without hope by building parks, schools, health clinics, and arts centers and by turning gritty, gang-infested neighborhoods into safe communities. Sadly, [a recent poll of 4,600 students in the state of Chihuahua revealed that 40 percent aspire to be "sicarios" or hit men.](#)

What about jobs? How do we anchor Juarez' return to civil society with the next generation of design manufacturing in one of the world's most sophisticated manufacturing clusters? Here are four cutting edge solutions in the mix. Let's expand the El Paso County Secure Border Trade Demonstration Program to equip 2,500 commercial trucks with state-of-the-art intelligent transportation system devices to secure cargo and transmit key data into a central repository where the data can be analyzed by software agents to detect anomalies that may have comprised the security of the protected cargo. This secure, fast, smart technology pilot program will help eliminate 8-hour wait times for commercial traffic at border crossings. During his recent visit to El Paso, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Alan Bersin committed 250 trucks to such a pilot—that's a start.

Second, let's offer [secure manufacturing tax credits](#) for manufacturers who enter the Secure Manufacturing Program. If you will pay for GPS, sealing and technology to let us know who and what are in the stream of commerce, then we will get you a tax credit to keep your costs low.

Third, we need to support a 21st century bi-national mass transit system consisting of [a 3.5 mile City of El Paso proposal linked to a proposal from the Municipio de Juarez to build a 10 mile cross-border, commuter rail](#). This transit system would safely and quickly link Juarez/El Paso business and education institutions and utilize biometric identifiers to ensure secure, fast movement of transit passengers across the border. Fixed rail mass transit systems will invite the development and capital so lacking today in downtown El Paso and Juarez and spur the re-development of cross border retail and business that has vanished in the last five years. Secure mass transit systems, like the one envisioned by these proposals, have long been used in Canada, in Europe, and even in the Green Zone in Baghdad. Notably, a similar rail system has been in use for years in the Seattle-Vancouver area.

Lastly, we need to analyze and prioritize ports-of-entry capacity projects. Every commercial lane in the Paso Del Norte ports-of-entry should have CBP personnel to move trade and commerce. Every border Port should have a state-of-the-art traffic management system so logistics managers can make "real time" decisions with "just in time" products. In 2003, the Data Management Improvement Act Task Force concluded that [70 percent of the 166 land ports-of-entry had inadequate infrastructure. Of these, 64 ports had less than 25 percent of the needed space.](#) These alarming statistics show that the problems at the border are not something that can be tweaked or easily corrected. Rather, they require a long-term program of sustained and strategic investments, aggressive political leadership and new revenue solutions to chronically underfunded infrastructure.

From D.C. to D.F., others have and will continue to define us in the absence of a united voice from our own community. So, at this historic juncture, let's define ourselves and our future. And let's put jobs, security, mobility and a competitive regional economy at the top of everyone's list.