

CITY COUNCIL REPORT

DATE: November 7, 2019
TO: Mayor and Councilmembers
FROM: Dawn Prince, Deputy City Manager
Cc: Jerene Watson, City Manager; Leadership Team
SUBJECT: Congressional Visit to the Border and Douglas

The report is to provide an update to all City Council since not everyone was not in attendance at the Congressional Visit on October 19th at the Government Center.

DISCUSSION:

Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick's office organized a Congressional visit for several elected officials to hear from the community about key border-related issues and get a better understanding of life in a rural border town. The visit was structured in the following manner, 3 members of Congress (Ann Kirkpatrick, AZ; Angie Craig, MN; Cheri Bustos, IL) spoke with 2 groups of individuals with ties to or interest in Douglas and the regional border community. Each member of the groups was asked to give their name, who they represented and their key priorities/issues.

The first group consisted of, representatives from Cochise College, the ranching community, Mayor Uribe, County Supervisor Ann English, Mignonne Hollis (Arizona Regional ED Foundation) and Dan Valle (Hispanic Chamber).

Here are some highlights of the key priorities/issues expressed by this group:

- Port of entry for its ability to be a catalyst for economic development and prosperity for not only Douglas but for the region. The border is an asset to the communities close to it, not what outsiders may paint it to be.
- Increased access to quality healthcare for rural communities. It is 1-3 hours to significant healthcare centers for many.
- Increased Broadband access for rural communities. There is some access but not broadly or in the high speeds needed. Some areas don't have any. This is critical for Economic development, for safety, and for access to education among other things.
- Need to decrease the time it takes for needed funding to get to rural areas.
- Border communities are foreign trade zones and should be dedicated as such.

- Border communities have a great deal of cross border trade which happens both ways. Trade is hampered by the extensive time it takes to cross. Up to three hours wait time sometimes.
- Economic Development, it's difficult for people to get business licenses that would allow enough inventory to be brought from Mexico to allow for long term business to occur. Businesses are limited to crossing for short stints, to sell their wares at festivals etc. such as the Sonora Fest.
- Infrastructure in terms of the extensive use of the streets at and around the borders crossings. Millions of cars and trucks cross the border but no thought is given to how all that traffic damages roads.
- Government has not communicated the way it should have regarding the wall which began being built last Monday. There are 19 miles of border wall going up partially on the property of several ranchers and they are in a difficult position. They were not consulted or communicated with beforehand, just showed up.
- The area the wall is being built in doesn't need a wall. They do not have the crossing numbers they used to. It used to be that 300 or more crosses every night. Now, only about 2 a week. The natural barriers and the change in the popularity of certain drugs are believed to be the reasons for the changes.
- The way the wall is being erected is not reasonable or sensitive to the preservation of the land and other environmental resources. 50,000 mgd is being pulled from the well of the ranchers every day without any compensation so far. There are reports of areas in Texas where the border wall is being built in such a way that American land is south of the wall.
- A trade deal with Mexico is necessary
- Border patrol is needed at the actual border. Right now, Border patrol are set up well north of the actual border. If Border patrol were at the border, we wouldn't need walls.
- Border shutdowns impact educational process. Students can't get to school.
- Looking for support on the Rail Freight corridor project being championed by the Hispanic Chamber.

The second group consisted of Mark Adams, Ginny Jordan, a dreamer, and several representatives from organizations who help refugees seeking asylum and undocumented individuals who are victims of domestic and other asylum qualifying violence.

Here are some highlights of the key priorities/issues expressed by this group:

- Douglas is a diverse community, unique and important place for migration of people and animals. A place where people come together. Douglas should be seen through the eyes of those who'll live here.
- Borders are usually thought of negatively. Not the actual story. Want to change the narrative with a new Border vision. Borders should be thought of a place of encounters of hope and opportunity.
- Border communities are harmed by many public policies that seal and secure the border when the border should be governed.

- It is said that dreamers take services, money and opportunities from others, that's not true. Dreamers face uncertainty in many parts of their everyday lives. When attending college, they must pay out of state tuition and do not qualify for scholarships, even if they would earn them by merit.
- Immigration policies are broken. It's not a crime to migrate.
- People coming to the border to seek asylum are fleeing violent and dangerous situations. The process is long, unfair and many times unsafe. Sometimes can take more than a year to get through the process. People are trying to do things the right way but many challenges are stacked against them.
- Undocumented victims of domestic or sexual assault or human trafficking are technically qualified to participate in programs to help them but getting to and connecting with those resources is extremely difficult.

Clarifying questions were asked throughout both sections.

The two non-AZ Congresswomen voiced the similarities between the communities in southern Arizona and the communities they represented which are also largely smaller communities (less than 5000 residents) and rural and in some cases on the border as well. They all let everyone know how happy they were to have had the chance to hear about our community and thanked all for sharing.

RECOMMENDATION / CONCLUSION:

This is informational only.