

Mounting Border Problems are Cause for New Migration Policy

By Talli Nauman | August 25, 2005

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff's pledge Aug. 24 to strengthen law and order on the U.S.-Mexico border was a response to recent demands for a more rational approach to migration problems. But it was a slap in the face to protagonists of the authentic resolution of U.S. conflicts over migration policy.

More than 350 human lives have already been lost in what could be the deadliest year on record for migrant families, thanks to inappropriately popular enforcement mechanisms, which have contributed to a climate of tension.

Interested parties have to recognize that the violence shrouding both transients and local residents is not just a border issue, rather an issue of national and international proportions, generated as it is by migration patterns and policies that can and should be modified.

The days when the U.S. government provided support for mediation of migration conflicts are gone, ever since the administration and its brittle props redefined border security as protectionism in the wake of Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks on the World Trade Organization headquarters and the Pentagon.

Back in those days, from June 2000 through June 2001, the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City helped the U.S.-Mexico Conflict Resolution Center at New Mexico State University bring together lawmakers, journalists, clergy, officials, and special interest group leaders from both sides of the border and all sides of the migration debate.

Sitting at the same table with members of the Third and Fourth Estates were representatives of such diverse camps as the El Paso, Texas migrant rights advocacy group Immigration Law Enforcement Monitoring Project, the Los Angeles-based restrictionist American Immigration Reform, and the Ciudad Juarez Roman Catholic Diocese.

And the participants did find common ground.

They agreed that all concerned would benefit by a reduction in migration from Mexico to the United States. They noted that sustainable hometown development pro-

viding remuneration in Mexican emigrant communities could relieve the pressure to migrate. They also proposed that a binational strategy of U.S. support for Mexican sustainable development could be realistic, provided necessary accountability measures were in place.

In other words, a broad-based consensus would call for addressing the economic root causes of migration between Mexico and the United States. It would mean changing the pattern so that strife and spending on border defense measures could be reduced at the same time health and welfare could be improved throughout North America.

If U.S. taxpayers contributed to verifiable sustainable development in Mexico, it sure would beat paying the price tag for the predictably unsuccessful alternative schemes being proposed.

One example, is the slick solution suggested Aug. 22 by U.S. Rep. Steve King (R-IA): throwing \$680 million at a 2,000-mile border fence 10 feet tall and topped with razor wire. Another is his proposed bill designed to send undocumented workers flocking home by sanctioning employers who pay them.

The lack of a more clearly framed nationwide view of the issues is why New Mexico and Arizona governors Bill Richardson and Janet Napolitano, pushed to the wall, declared states of emergency and eligibility for millions of dollars in disaster aid for their border counties on Aug. 12 and thereafter. Across the border from Arizona, Sonora Gov. Eduardo Bours responded supportively with additional monetary commitments to increase check-points on smuggling routes that have blighted his state with human traffickers' foul legacy.

The declarations are a plea for federal attention, following in the long wake of official Mexican neglect and U.S.



Border Patrol cat-and-mouse operations that have funneled tens of thousands of migrants onto private lands, overrunning them with illegal human activities and fueling a vigilante movement with unconscionable discriminatory implications for migrants.

In this scenario desperation is the watchword. The people caught up in the crisis feel abandoned by their own lawmakers. But beefier law enforcement is not the panacea. The veritable state of siege is the U.S. Southwest's argument for a comprehensive national immigration reform when Congress opens the next session this fall.

Unfortunately none of the proposed bills considers binational sustainable development policy as even a part of the equation to relieve stress on U.S.-Mexico border states.

Policy tools are now available to promote sustainable development. Encouraging fair trade mechanisms is just

one example. The time has come for policymakers to put the tools to work.

Of course, community groups and broader organizations will have to rally to the cause of community sustainable development globally before the critical mass can be reached for not only moving politicians in the debate but also establishing systems of verifying honest use of monetary commitments to needs communities determine.

This coalescence requires a return to dialogues for conflict resolution. And it calls for a good-neighbor mentality—one based on the everyday practice of individual responsibility by citizens and policymakers of the United States, Mexico, and other nations.

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