

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 11, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker McCarthy and Leader Jeffries:

We, members of the New Democrat Coalition, write to call for bipartisan collaboration to deliver solutions that meaningfully address the challenges presented by increased migration to the United States, particularly the southern border.

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle can agree that our country desperately needs commonsense immigration and border reform. Last year, federal border agents encountered more than 2 million unauthorized individuals in between ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border; our asylum courts now face an ever-growing backlog of more than 1.5 million cases; and when the Title 42 order is lifted, there will undoubtedly be a substantial near-term increase in migrant encounters at the border.

There are many aspects of the U.S. immigration system that must be fixed to strengthen our economy and better secure the border. We must modernize our asylum process; establish clear pathways to citizenship for undocumented Dreamers, farmworkers and TPS holders; and ensure that federal agents at the border have the resources they need to humanely and expeditiously process migrant claims.

The approach put forward in H.R. 2, the “Secure the Border Act,” will not improve our immigration system. Although proposals to help improve security along the southern border have generally earned bipartisan support, we are deeply concerned that the primary intent of this bill is to make our nation’s asylum system inaccessible to those who seek refuge.

We also believe that some aspects of H.R. 2 will actually make the border *less* secure. It would strain law enforcement resources that prevent drug trafficking and intercept national security threats by implementing policies that divert those resources towards efforts to criminalize long-term undocumented immigrants and indefinitely detain asylum seekers. It would also deny agency leadership and experts on the ground the discretion to direct limited resources where those resources could have the greatest impact.

We can do better. New Democrats support an alternative approach that provides critical investments in border security with additional pathways for legal migration, so that people can come to the United States to work, unite with their families, and seek humanitarian relief through a safe, orderly, humane process.

Evidence overwhelmingly shows that, when given the chance, migrants will opt to use legal avenues for which they qualify. But for years now, few such pathways have existed for people in the Western Hemisphere, whether through the refugee system, permanent immigration process, or temporary work programs. And as the few remaining legal avenues have become more difficult to access in recent years, irregular migration has increased. H.R. 2 would further constrict those remaining pathways.

Instead, we should reduce unauthorized arrivals at the southern border by creating new legal pathways, including legislating additional visa categories to support industries facing historic labor shortages, or expanding refugee pathways and in-country processing so migrants are not forced to make the dangerous journey to the U.S. border.

We share concerns about the federal government's preparedness efforts leading up to the lifting of Title 42 and the anticipated increases in arrivals of families and individuals as a result of the policy transition; however, we strongly disagree with proposals to automatically disqualify entire groups of people from applying for asylum in the first place.

Rather than dismantle the asylum system, we should pass legislation to significantly expedite screening and adjudications while protecting due process, so that migrants are not released into the United States for years at a time. We should build capacity for the government agencies involved to share information and process applications more quickly. When individuals are detained, we must ensure that conditions are safe, humane and dignified—which includes providing migrants with access to medical care, legal counsel, and communication with family members.

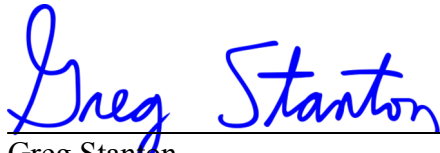
In addition, Congress must deliver more support to local governments and communities, including through adequate appropriations for the Emergency Food and Shelter Program, which provides funding for the many NGOs and faith-based organizations near border communities that provide refuge to migrants who have nowhere to go upon being released from federal custody. H.R. 2 would gut that program, which would have a devastating humanitarian impact and force U.S. Customs and Border Protection to make more street releases in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

We are committed to stopping fentanyl and other dangerous drugs from wreaking havoc on our communities. The vast majority of fentanyl trafficked into the United States is *not* carried by migrants, but by U.S. citizens crossing through legal ports of entry. Shutting down legal immigration avenues and forcing migrants into irregular migration and interactions with coyotes and criminal networks will not reduce fentanyl smuggling and human trafficking—in fact, it will make those crises worse.

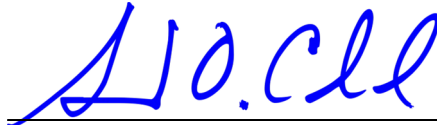
We continue to support investment in border technologies, improved infrastructure at our ports of entry, and hiring increases that will strengthen Border Patrol's ability to detect and disrupt threats along the border. This should include modernizing screening equipment that better detects concealed drugs such as fentanyl; building up infrastructure so people, vehicles, and goods can be processed more efficiently; and ramping up hiring while providing meaningful support to CBP staff. We should also ensure agents have adequate resources to dismantle smuggling tunnels, conduct mail interdiction activities, and establish additional outposts in strategic locations so that agents can more readily respond to intel and interdict smugglers.

An orderly, humane migration process and a secure border can—and should—go hand-in-hand. We believe the majority of lawmakers in Congress want a border that is secure, an immigration system that works, and a country that proudly stands as a beacon of hope and safety to the rest of the world. We are ready to work with you to build a system that achieves those goals.

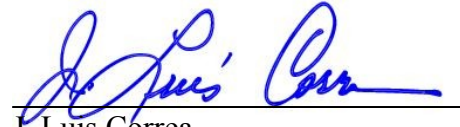
Sincerely,



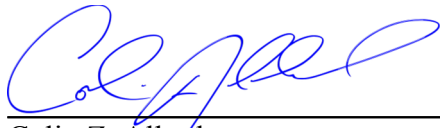
Greg Stanton
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Salud Carbajal
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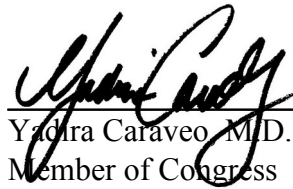
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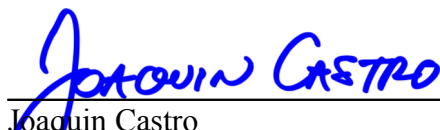
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André Carson
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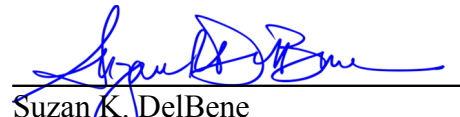
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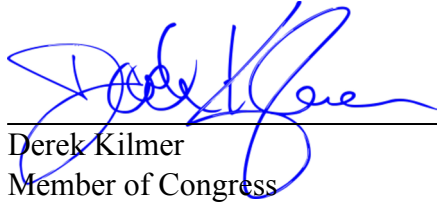
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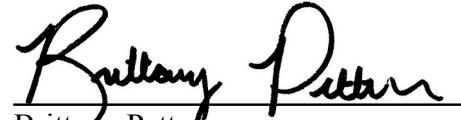
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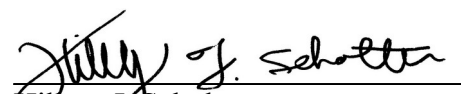
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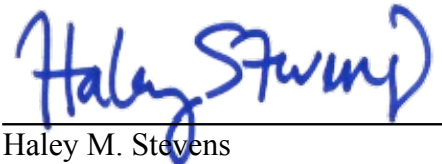
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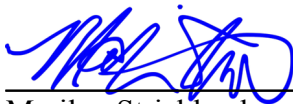
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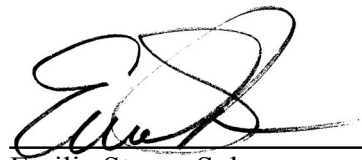
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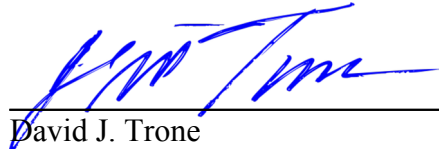
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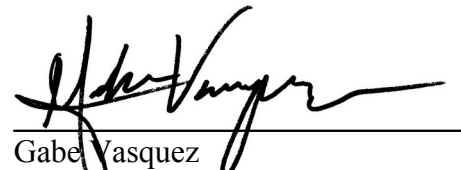
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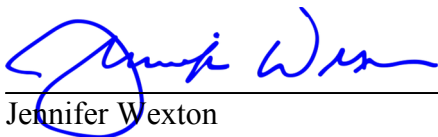
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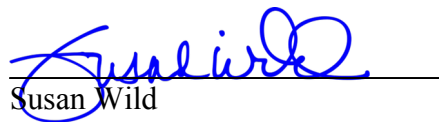
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