



TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**EDDIE MORALES, JR.**

District 74

May 10, 2022

Governor Greg Abbott  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, TX 78711

Governor Abbott:

I appreciate your determination in working to improve the crisis along the border. With that sentiment in mind, I would respectfully request that you consider the following concepts/ideas that will provide sensible, non-partisan solutions the state can incorporate immediately to enhance the current procedures to curtail the migrant crisis and unprecedented influx of migrants affecting our border communities.

As you are aware, I represent Texas House District 74, which now includes 9 out of the 14 counties that share a border with Mexico. The District represents approximately 775 border miles and four (4) land ports of entry (seven (7) if including the land ports in El Paso). House District 74 stretches from Eagle Pass to El Paso.

As you have seen during my time in the Legislature, I am a strong believer in the power of bipartisanship and dialogue. As the 88<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session approaches, it is my hope we can continue the work we accomplished during the Second Special Session in which we passed HB 9 (border security bill)—a bill I am proud to have joint authored (only Democrat) in an effort to secure our border. The passage of HB 9 allocated over \$1 billion in funds to your office to be dispersed for the purpose of securing our border and providing support to law enforcement and local governments working along with the state on this critical responsibility. Considering the broad reach and use of these border funds by your office, I ask that you consider the following measures:

**ABBOTT'S LAND PORTS INFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVE:**

- 1.) **Expand Land Ports**- Use HB9 funds to expand ports of entry to facilitate the trade and flow of commerce with the goal of shortening cross times for commerce during a time where supply chain issues are at the forefront. Our land ports represent over 55% of all of Texas' international trade, accounting for well over \$400 billion annually. Investing in communities like Eagle Pass, Del Rio, and Presidio will help other border communities with much higher crossing times. Our ports of entry are the principal element of sustaining the economic bond that is critical to Texas and Mexico. As recently seen, when delays and backups occur at our ports of entry, Texans suffer.

- 2.) **Expand Texas Hwy. 57-** It is important to note that Mexico and the state of Coahuila are working on expanding Interstate Highway 57, which will bring all trade from Eastern Asia arriving on the Pacific coast of Mexico through Coahuila and thereafter into Del Rio and Eagle Pass. (The expansion of Hwy. 57 in Mexico will create and result in additional traffic flow into the land ports in Maverick and Val Verde counties.) As you are aware, during your recent visit with Coahuila Governor Riquelme, the state of Coahuila is the safest state in Mexico as it relates to the drug cartel. Coahuila is bearing the fruits of this designation, which has resulted in a substantial increase in investments, projects, commerce, and job growth opportunities in the region. The Constellation Brands Nava Brewery across from Eagle Pass is the largest in the world, and it also includes one of the largest glass production facilities in the world. This facility is built with over \$5 billion dollars in construction costs. We provided TXDOT with the highway construction projects underway in Coahuila. It is imperative that the state act quickly to eliminate bottleneck and cross traffic congestion on the border in order to take advantage of the trade and commerce that will benefit this region and the entire state of Texas.
- 3.) **FM 1021 to Connect Maverick to Webb County-** This Farm to Market road requires approximately 20 miles of paving to connect Maverick to Webb County. It is the only stretch of road between Del Rio and Brownsville that does NOT connect along the river vega. This project would serve as an integral part of the border security measures the state should undertake to reduce the migrant crossings taking place between Maverick and Webb counties. Homeland Security and local law enforcement administrative personnel support the construction of this roadway that will also reduce the travel time to each city by 30 minutes and result in additional commerce flow in the region. The estimates for the road are approximately \$25 million. I would urge you to allocate funding for this road from the HB9 funds, which would result in far greater benefits than a temporary wall structure. The region would benefit by securing our border, providing access to law enforcement to a previously difficult area to patrol, and will create an immediate impact in terms of commerce and trade for all Texans. Building this new road will provide law enforcement access to areas that have proven difficult for vehicles to reach but remain highly trafficked by migrants.
- 4.) **Hi-Tech Virtual Border Wall-** The equipment and resources are available today to ensure that we have the most up-to-date measures to address a 21<sup>st</sup> century problem with the latest technology. The equipment is much more discreet, stealthy, and when compared to a physical barrier, easier to move and relocate depending on the surveillance needs and terrain. If we move swiftly, with the use of drones, cameras, motion-detection lights and alongside surveillance towers in high-trafficked areas, Texas can be more proactive in stopping these illegal crossings. Such technology-based security efforts and utilizing public/private partnerships would be beneficial for keeping our border secure and bolstering the tech industry that is vital to Texas.

- 5.) **Border Sheriff Coalition Funding/ Operation Linebacker 2.0-** As former Governor Perry stated, “sheriffs are the front lines on the fight against border crime...”. During his years as Governor, Operation Linebacker assisted Sheriff departments with state funding to address crime on the border. While I support the assistance currently being provided by State Troopers and the National Guard, the reality is that no one knows and understands their community and terrain better than local Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs). Allocating funding to border sheriffs to hire additional personnel and surveillance equipment will help reduce the heavy workload. It may also aid in returning state troopers and National Guard soldiers back to their communities. As you know, many have been deployed for months away from their homes and family members. Giving local control back to local LEOs will ensure that the right resources, personnel, and funds are put to best use. Sheriff Dodson from Brewster County explained how he could hire 2 deputies for the cost of 1 trooper and place those deputies right on the border to deter crossings. Sheriff Dodson currently has over 120 arrests compared to the 8 arrests by state troopers during the same time in his County. The Brewster Sheriff’s office has also invested in its own virtual wall technology and placed over 100 cameras along the river vega that aid in the detection and capture of illegal activity. The strategy works and can be duplicated in others border counties.
- 6.) **Carrizo Cane Eradication Pilot Project-** One of the difficulties in patrolling the river vega is the thick and invasive Carrizo cane (*Arundo donax*) along the river banks. Carrizo Cane is an invasive riparian weed that can grow up to 4 inches per day and be 25 feet tall in a year's time. It provides cover and shelter for migrants and drug runners and makes it difficult for LEOs to operate and patrol. The invasive Carrizo cane also results in losses of several million gallons per year of river water that could benefit communities along the border. With water becoming a more precious commodity (both my office and yours were recently made aware of water shortages facing the Maverick County Water Control & Improvement District), any environmental projects aimed to reduce the water losses will result in significant gains to Texas. It is estimated that the eradication of the cane will result in several million gallons of water saved with a conservative value of over \$1 million in annual cost savings. Kunafin “The Insectary” is a local family-owned company operating in Maverick County and is an industry leader in producing beneficial insects/parasites to protect crops. The use of natural parasites provides a safe and environmentally friendly method to address crop control measures. A pilot project on the use of natural insecticides along the border to eliminate the invasive Carrizo cane may serve as a beneficial cost measure that will aid in border security and water conservation. We ask that you consider earmarking funds for this pilot project where we can start with 1 mile of river vega cane to determine the benefits of using this process to eradicate the Carrizo cane.

### **THE TEXAS MIGRANT EIN PILOT PROJECT**

It is clear that Congress has failed to take action in passing effective immigration reform policies to curb the current migrant crisis. As a result, our state has suffered exorbitant losses and expenditures on an issue that Congress should have resolved decades ago. Their failure creates an

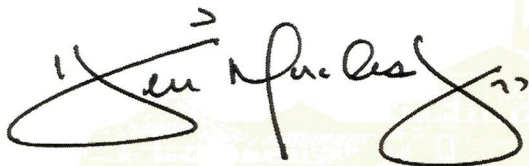
opportunity for bold and effective leadership with the aim of resolving the migrant crisis, increasing the Texas workforce, and adding funds to the state coffers by implementing a pilot project that allows migrants to work in Texas in sectors where employers are having a hard time finding able bodies. Texas currently has over 884,000 job openings that remain unfilled with an unemployment rate of 4.4%. If migrants want to reside in Texas, they have to work, plain and simple. It sends a strong message about work ethic and the expectations our Governor and state will have when it comes to migrants. The Pilot Project could work as follows:

- **Texas Employer Identification Number-** Migrants are provided with a Texas Employment Identification Number (“TXEIN ID”). If the migrant has legal documentation that allows him/her to stay in the United States and if the migrant decides to reside in Texas, he/she will be required to obtain gainful employment as a condition of their continued residence in Texas.
- **Migrants and the Texas Economy-** Migrants can seek employment using the TXEIN ID. It would allow them to come out of the shadows and pay their fair share of employment and sales taxes for products. The TXEIN ID will also aid LEOs in determining whether the migrant has the residency status to remain in Texas.
- **Brazero/Farm Worker TXEIN ID -** The TXEIN ID can be used to mirror the brazero-type immigration visa issued decades ago for migrants willing to work in ranches. The ID can also be used for migrants willing to work on farmlands and in the agricultural industry where thousands of job employment opportunities remain unfilled. It will result in an immediate boom to the Texas economy and protect local businesses and companies eager to employ an able workforce.
- **Annual ID Fee-** Assess an annual TXEIN ID fee that migrants have to pay in order to remain in good standing and continue to reside in Texas. This includes provisions against any criminal activity (that falls outside of a Class C misdemeanor) since it would result in immediate removal/deportation from Texas. The funds from this fee can be earmarked for continued border operations.
- **Criminalize/Penalize River Crossings-** The current migrant crisis and stay proceedings incentivize cartel and human smugglers to cross migrants through the river, endangering the lives of migrants as well as our law enforcement personnel. Texas must lead the efforts in curtailing the river crossings by having all migrants process through land ports. Anyone crossing through the river would be subject to a residency ban in Texas, incarceration, and subject to fines and penalties. As Texas Department of Public Safety Director Steve McCraw recently agreed in the Joint Homeland Security and Defense and Veterans Affairs hearing, those who try to cross the river illegally should face immediate deportation.

**Bi-National Workforce Agreements with Mexican Governors-** Similar to your recent MOU agreements with Mexican Governors related to the inspection of commercial truck traffic crossing the border, the state of Texas can take a bold step and lead with workforce agreements that provide for temporary work visas for migrants and Mexican nationals based on economic and employment needs from businesses in Texas. The program would clear the path for Texas businesses to employ migrants without fear of criminal prosecution. It would also ensure that our products, goods, and services continue to flow throughout the state and the nation.

I am aware some of these suggestions may go beyond the purview of our state. However, given the importance of the border issue, I believe it is time to take bold steps to secure our border and have our state lead the nation toward a solution for this crisis. The way we get through this crisis is by working together. If necessary, I am agreeable to discussing the above in more detail with you or your staff in an effort to create proactive solutions, as no individual can do this alone. I believe we can effectively work and lead the effort on the migrant/immigration issue to not only protect our border, but also bolster the Texas economy so we can continue fostering growth for future generations of Texans. I have confidence in your desire to bring bipartisan effective solutions to secure Texans' safety, provide humane treatment to migrants, and bolster Texas' robust economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eddie Morales, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

State Representative Eddie Morales, Jr.  
House District 74

CC: Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick  
Speaker Dade Phelan  
Chair Joan Huffman, Senate Finance  
Chairman Bryan Hughes, Senate State Affairs  
Chairman Greg Bonnen, House Appropriations  
Chairman James White, House Homeland Security & Public Safety  
Chairman Richard Raymond, House Defense and Veterans Affairs