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July 7, 2020

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

President Andrés López Obrador
Palacio Nacional
Puerta 8, Plaza de la Constitución S/N, Colonia Centro
Ciudad de México, C.P. 06066

Dear President Trump and President López Obrador:

The bilateral relationship between the United States and Mexico is a critical one. Our two countries share nearly 2,000 miles of border as well as familial, environmental, and economic ties. As we continue to see the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic ravage our two countries, our collaboration has never been more important. I urge you then to work toward a binational strategy to tackle COVID-19. With over 130,000 American and 30,000 Mexican lives lost to the virus, it is vital that you implement a robust border mitigation, testing, and contact tracing plan that protects our shared interests. Without a binational response, the lives, livelihoods, and economies of our border communities continue to be at risk; we need urgent action.

As affirmed by the USMCA, our economies are interdependent, fueled by trade that supports millions of jobs on both sides of the border and throughout our two countries. Manufacturing plants in Mexico are connected to supply chains in the U.S. and it is in both countries' best interest to prioritize the health, safety, and welfare of border residents. Border communities like El Paso are the key lifeline for that economic connection and we must do all we can to safely facilitate the movement of goods and people. Mexicans and Americans alike go back and forth between our two countries daily for work, school, and medical care. It is this interdependence that makes shutting down our borders a non-starter.

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic knows no borders, but the fact is that minority groups are far more vulnerable. According to National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, Latinos are at higher risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19 due to underlying health issues and comorbidities, like diabetes and heart disease, coupled with socio-economic

challenges such as high rates of poverty, and lack of access to healthcare. Dr. Fauci has made it clear that Latino communities are as vulnerable to COVID-19 as nursing homes and assisted living facilities are, and he informed me and other members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus that the only way to help Latino communities combat COVID-19 is to flood them with resources for testing and tracing.

The U.S. was slow to respond to the pandemic, and unfortunately, many border states like Texas and Arizona that rapidly reopened before implementing robust testing and tracing policies have become hotspots. On the Mexican side, the federal government has not invested significantly in testing and contact tracing and I have learned that the only public testing taking place is for individuals admitted into hospitals. Communities on both sides of the border, especially those that are key economic arteries, should have identical testing and tracing policies and resources as well as identical safety regulations and enforcement.

I recently convened a meeting with other border delegation members to discuss addressing this shared health and economic crisis. Your meeting should prioritize a shared strategy and potentially shared resources that will be required to slow the spread of COVID-19. Without intervention, tens of thousands more lives will be needlessly lost, our economies will further recede, and our nations will struggle to rebuild for years to come.

Finally, there should not be a conversation about COVID-19 without the discussion of the impact this pandemic has had on vulnerable migrants at our border who were pushed out of the United States and into Mexico. The so-called Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) has put asylum-seekers at risk by making them wait in Mexico until the date of their hearing with very little access to testing and healthcare unless they are symptomatic and in need of hospital care. In some cases, this has resulted in the formation of large migrant camps with thousands in close quarters and poor sanitary conditions. These camps could serve as breeding grounds for the virus and with one case already being confirmed at a camp in Matamoros, Mexico, COVID-19 could spread like wildfire among the migrant population throughout the border region. COVID-19 put immigration hearings on hold for months furthering endangering these vulnerable lives. Both countries – the United States and Mexico – have been complicit in creating these conditions and have an obligation to end the unlawful immigration policies that are putting these vulnerable populations in potentially deadly situations.

It is my hope that you recognize the mutual benefit of crafting and investing in a plan that keeps our people and economies safe on the U.S.-Mexico border and will act with the urgency that this pandemic requires.

Sincerely,



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress