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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION,
CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION
AND CITIZENSHIP



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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July 21, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer,

As the House and Senate consider the next coronavirus (COVID-19) relief package, we urge you to include language mandating a binational strategy between the United States and Mexico to tackle COVID-19 and the resources necessary to implement it. With COVID-19 continuing to ravage both countries, it has never been more important for the United States to partner with Mexico to develop a robust border mitigation, testing, and contact tracing plan. Without a coordinated binational response, our border communities' lives, livelihoods, and the American economy will continue to be at risk.

Our relationship with Mexico is fueled by trade that supports millions of jobs on both sides of the border and throughout the two countries. This interdependence has been affirmed by the recently implemented United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and border communities serve as key lifelines for this critical economic connection. That is why it is critical we prioritize the health, safety, and welfare of border residents who go back and forth between our two countries daily for work, school and medical care.

COVID-19 knows no borders, but it is a fact that minority groups are far more susceptible. 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. Coupled with socio-economic challenges such as high rates of poverty and lack of access to healthcare leaves Latino communities just as vulnerable to COVID-19 as nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Dr. Fauci made it clear in a phone call with 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.

Unfortunately, the White House and the Senate have not acted with urgency and border states like Arizona and Texas rapidly reopened before implementing effective testing and tracing policies. As a result, these states and the border communities within them have become COVID-19 hotspots. Additionally, Mexico has not made the investments necessary to increase testing and contact tracing and currently the only public testing taking place is for individuals admitted to hospitals. Communities on both sides of the border, especially those that are key economic arteries, should have identical testing and tracing policies and the resources necessary to complete testing locally to decrease the amount of time border residents must wait for their results.

Furthermore, any binational strategy for COVID-19 must consider ways to help vulnerable migrants at our border who were pushed out of the U.S. and into Mexico as a result of the so-called Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP). Asylum seekers are forced to wait in Mexico until the date of their hearing with 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 confirmed at a camp in Matamoros, Mexico, COVID-19 could spread like wildfire throughout the border region. This only emphasizes the need for our countries to prioritize a robust testing and contact tracing plan for the border region.

Finally, prior to President Trump's meeting with Mexican President López Obrador earlier this month Congresswoman Escobar called on them to take the opportunity to develop a binational strategy to address COVID-19. While we had hoped this meeting would yield concrete details for how the U.S. and Mexico will work together to defeat COVID-19, none were produced. In fact, in an interview this weekend President Trump complained about the lack of testing in Mexico and criticized Mexico for not helping the U.S. Clearly, President Trump is not going to provide leadership on this issue and it will fall on Congress to ensure the safety of border residents by creating a binational strategy.

We thank you for your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you in the coming days.

Sincerely,



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

/s/ Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

/s/ Filemon Vela
Member of Congress

/s/ Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress