



BORDER LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

14th Legislative Forum
Phoenix, Arizona
December 7-9, 2006

The Border Legislative Conference (BLC) convened its 14th Legislative Forum in Phoenix, Arizona on December 7-9, 2006. The forum included the participation from all 10 U.S. – Mexico border states, including California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas.

The 14th BLC focused on the topics of the 1) economic development; 2) water solutions and best practices for a sustainable border region; 3) cross border blood drive efforts; 4) the Border 2012 Environmental Program; and 5) energy. For a complete list of speakers please see attached final agenda.

The following represents a synopsis of the significant policy actions adopted by the members of the BLC during their 14th legislative forum.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The members of the BLC adopted the recommendations by the BLC's Economic Development Committee derived from stakeholder input during three regional border economic development forums convened over the last 14 months (see attachment 1). The regional forums were jointly organized with the Border Affairs Committee of Mexico's Federal Senate. In addition, the members of the BLC incorporated the recommendations by speakers Bruce Wright of the University of Arizona and Luis Ramirez representing the Border Trade Alliance.

The recommendations will be used to develop the Border 2020 - *Secure, Fast, Smart* Vision Strategy.

The members of the BLC also unanimously agreed to a minor modification to the Secure Manufacturing Zones proposal that incorporates language on the need to enhance the expedition of non-commercial border crossings.

BORDER SECURITY

The members of the BLC expressed concern about the passage and signing of the Secure Fence Act by the U.S. Congress earlier this year which authorizes the construction of hundreds of miles of additional fencing along the U.S. southern border. The law also authorizes the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to add more vehicle barriers, checkpoints, lighting and use of advance technologies like cameras, satellites, and unmanned aerial vehicles to reinforce infrastructure and security at the border.

The members of the BLC unanimously agreed to send correspondence to U.S. and Mexico federal officials expressing 1) that the U.S. and Mexico share the responsibility of securing the common border region while respecting the sovereign rights of each country; 2) an enforcement-only approach is not a solution to practical, comprehensive immigration reform; 3) resources can be better dedicated to enhance transportation infrastructure and port of entry operations along the border to move people and goods in a secure and efficient manner; 4) concerns about the symbolism and impacts that this approach will have to the historic, cultural, and trade relationship between the U.S. and Mexico; and 5) invite federal officials from the U.S. and Mexico to the next BLC to provide border state legislators an overview of border security efforts and how resources will be utilized to create a border for the 21st Century.

Furthermore, the letter will reaffirm the BLC's support of a comprehensive border security and immigration strategy that, among other things, promotes:

- The establishment of binational mechanisms that promote the legal, secure, orderly and humane immigration;
- Policies and reforms that establish the necessary conditions in Mexico and the U.S. to mitigate the impacts of illegal immigration in the border region and promote economic integration for the North American Hemisphere;
- Deepened, strategic collaboration among law enforcement entities among all levels of government in the U.S. and Mexico to protect immigrants and border residents from abuse by organized crime and smugglers.
- Support for fair and comprehensive immigration legislation that balances border security concerns with the recognition of U.S. demand for workers, including a guest worker program and path to legalization;
- support of initiatives aimed at promoting investment and economic opportunities of migrant sending regions in Mexico such as the U.S. – Mexico Partnership for Prosperity and Mexico's 3 for 1 Program that encourages the voluntary use of remittance to build local infrastructure and economic development in migrant sending regions.

WATER

The members of the BLC expressed support of the Border Environment Cooperation Commission's "Border Water Vision" statement to meet the long-term water needs of the U.S. – Mexico border region. The participating members of the BLC called upon the BECC and other stakeholders to work in unison in developing a comprehensive, binational strategic water plan to effectively plan, assess, and develop best management practices and regional strategies along the border region to address current and future needs. Moreover, the BLC reaffirmed its call for long term planning and an open and transparent public process to achieve sustainable water and sanitation infrastructure projects along the border.

ENVIRONMENT

The members of the BLC reaffirmed their support of the Border Environment Infrastructure Fund (BEIF) and requested staff to prepare correspondence in support of the BEIF for the review and approval of the officers of the BLC to be sent to the appropriate U.S. and Mexico entities. The BEIF administers grant resources provided by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help finance the construction of water and wastewater projects in the U.S.-Mexico border region.

HEALTH: BLOOD SECURITY

The members of the BLC expressed support of binational efforts to promote voluntary donation of blood; advance the harmonization of blood transfusion services; and establishment of blood reserves along the U.S. – Mexico border. Moreover, the members of the BLC from Mexican border states agreed to pursue public policy recommendations that:

- Support programs and budgetary efforts that promote the voluntary donation of blood;
- Encourage State Health Commissions to revise and adjust state regulations to strengthen blood transfusion programs; and
- Promote the coordination, research, education, administrative organization, quality guarantees, evaluation, and sustainability of voluntary blood transfusion programs.

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

Diputado Juan Jose Gonzalez of Chihuahua rotates to the position of Chair for 2007. Participating legislators from the U.S. border states elected Senator Eliot Shapleigh of Texas as the 2007 Vice Chair of the BLC.

The members unanimously accepted the invitation by the members of the Chihuahua delegation to convene the Fifteenth Border Legislative Conference in the State of Chihuahua in the spring of 2007. The Forum will focus on the topics of 1) immigration, 2) border crossings/infrastructure; 3) trafficking of persons; and 4) substance abuse. The date and location of the forum will be forthcoming.

The Officers of the BLC, the Council of State Governments, the United States Agency for International Development, and the Conference of Western Attorneys General signed a Joint Declaration affirming their support and commitment to the goals and objectives of the newly established U.S. – Mexico State Alliance Partnership. The State Alliance Partnership will maintain continued financial support of the BLC and establishes new binational mechanisms of cooperation between state attorney generals and treasurers of the United States and Mexico.