



COAHUILA DECLARATION 2008

17th Border Legislative Conference
Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico
April 10-12, 2008

Whereas, state legislators of the United States and Mexico border states of Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas, along with the participation of federal legislators from Mexico's Senate and Chamber of Deputies, convened in the City of Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico on April 10-12 for the 17th Border Legislative Conference to openly discuss and exchange perspectives on critical issues related to sustainability and prosperity of the border region;

Whereas, the United States of America and the United Mexican States are two sovereign and independent nations, each with its own clear identity and legal frameworks;

Whereas, the United States and Mexico share a border of nearly two thousand miles, as well as common values and a vision for the prosperity of the border region;

Whereas, the United States - Mexico border region is among the most dynamic in the world, where the border is not a line that divides the two countries but rather a central point that unites and invites cooperation of mutual benefit among both nations;

Whereas, the challenges of the 21st Century require the identification, promotion and implementation of concrete solutions – at all levels of government – that, among others, foster regional economic competitiveness, joint and long-term strategic planning, social and demographic trends, exchange of information and “best practices,” and the development of a common vision for the prosperity of the United States – Mexico border region;

Whereas, border legislators and legislatures play a pivotal role – in their capacity as lawmakers and legislative oversight function – to support and develop initiatives and programs that enhance the quality of life of the residents of the United States – Mexico border region, as well as to jointly convey the concerns and opportunities to multi-level governments of both countries;

Whereas, the goal of the Border Legislative Conference is to empower border state legislators to engage in the binational agenda and provide input and direction in the development of policy between both countries;

Whereas, the ongoing meetings among border state legislators of the United States – Mexico border states have allowed for continuous dialog on common concerns and opportunities to promote to enhance economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and an improve quality of life for the inhabitant’s of the border region.

Therefore, the members of the Border Legislative Conference adopt the following declarations and recommendations in the following policy areas:

BINATIONAL WATER MANAGEMENT

The members of the Border Legislative Conference expressed unanimous support of the following concepts related to binational management of water resources along the United States – Mexico border region:

- Encourage border state to work with the North American Development Bank and other federal entities to enhance financing tools such as grants, loans and information sharing to state and local governments to develop water infrastructure projects;
- Encourage the consideration of federal legislation to modify existing rules regarding projects for cities outside the North American Development Bank coverage area;
- Encourage the continued development of programs that promote the efficient and ecologically-sensitive use of water, including but not limited to, wastewater treatment; and surface water and groundwater withdrawal and return regulations;
- Encourage border state executive branch agencies and legislatures to share “best practices” on water conservation and efficiency policies;
- Encourage and consider state and federal public policies that integrate climate variability, continued population growth and industrial uses along the United States – Mexico border region;
- Request that United States and Mexico states and federal entities conduct comprehensive groundwater assessments of the border region to better understand existing water supplies; conduct joint studies; and develop regional, border-wide water strategies;

- Promote policies that encourage the use of recycled water resources for urban and industrial uses;
- Encourage concrete lining of ditching and the use of drip irrigation to enhance water use efficiency; and
- Encourage border states and local governments, along with non-governmental organizations, to conduct and promote education campaigns aimed informing the public of water conservation strategies.

IMMIGRATION

The members of the Border Legislative Conference conducted an open and passionate discussion on the topic of immigration. Participating legislators strongly reaffirmed their call on the federal governments of the United States and Mexico to work towards the implementation of a comprehensive immigration accord that addresses the United States' demand for workers and the border security needs of both countries. The members of the Border Legislative Conference adopted the following concepts:

- Federal resources should be focused on strategies to improve efficient interdiction at our borders;
- Limited state resources should not be diverted to support policies and initiatives that tolerate or result in racial profiling in border communities;
- It is the United States government's obligation to fund and oversee a well-trained Border Patrol acting consciously of basic human rights of immigrants;
- Legislation, or any acts that violate the human rights of immigrants, documented or undocumented, should be condemned. Law enforcement agencies, both federal and state, must treat all immigrants with respect and dignity and adhere to the legal rights they are entitled under state, federal or international treaties, especially the rights of minors through the utilization of procedures and programs that protect them;
- Legislation that focuses solely on enforcement will be ineffective. Border legislators support fair and comprehensive immigration legislation that balances border security concerns with recognition of the U.S. demand for workers in the numerous sectors of the U.S. labor force, including agriculture, construction, and the service economy;

- The federal governments of the United States and Mexico should invest now in secure, fast and smart technology solutions to afford free trade and movement in the Western Hemisphere for the security of people and products;
- Border legislators support laws that offer a path to citizenship, under clearly defined guidelines, to immigrants who have demonstrated citizenship, paid taxes, and birthed children and grandchildren;
- A temporary worker program that allows employers to sponsor low-skilled immigrant workers to obtain residence status should be supported. Undocumented students under the age of 21 should be able to satisfy the requirements under such a program by attending an institution of higher education or a secondary school full-time;
- Border legislators support legislation that provides a larger number of employment and family-based residency cards to promote family unification and reduce backlogs in application processing;
- Border legislators encourage the federal governments of the United States and Mexico to support initiatives aimed at promoting investment and economic opportunities of migrant-sending regions in Mexico, such as the United States - Mexico Partnership for Prosperity and Mexico's 3 for 1 program that encourages the use of remittances to build local infrastructure and economic development in Mexico;
- The development and implementation of plans regarding information-sharing, international and federal-state-local coordination, technology, and anti-smuggling should be supported;
- The development of multilateral agreements to establish a North American security plan to improve border security should be supported;
- Measure that would include anti-fraud measures and biometric data on all visa and immigration documents should be supported;
- The ongoing implementation of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America between the U.S., Canada and Mexico, aimed at establishing a common security strategy, competitiveness, quality of life, and to promote economic growth by streamlining the secure movement of low-risk traffic across our shared borders, should be supported;
- Border legislators support legislation that authorizes additional federal funds to states and local governments for reimbursement of the indirect costs relation to the incarceration of undocumented immigrants should be supported; as well as for the health and educational needs of immigrant populations;

- Discourage state legislation aimed at taxing immigrants' remittances; and
- Border legislators recognize and respect signed international immigration agreements between United States and Mexico.

These declarations were adopted by unanimous decision by members present and voting of the border states of California, New Mexico, Texas, Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, Coahuila and Sonora.

Legislators from the State of Sonora presented members of the Border Legislative Conference a resolution expressing strong concerns regarding the adoption and implementation of an employer sanctions law in the State of Arizona. The law imposes penalties on employers that knowingly or intentionally hire undocumented immigrants in Arizona. The resolution was unanimously supported by Mexico members of the Border Legislative Conference. Mexico members requested the Chair and Vice Chair of the Border Legislative Conference that the document be included in the meeting minutes to ensure the expressions and concerns of the Mexico delegation regarding this law are recorded.

STATE EXECUTIVE – LEGISLATION COOPERATION

The members of the Border Legislative Conference, via majority vote of the members present and voting, expressed the following statements regarding state executive – legislative branch cooperation through the Border Governors Conference and the Border Legislative Conference:

- The members of the Border Legislative Conference expressed support of the Border Governors Conference 2007 Joint Declaration;
- The members of the Border Legislative Conference directed staff to work with border legislators, members of the state border affairs committees and the respective work tables of the Border Governors Conference to identify legislative actions aimed at enacting specific recommendations identified in the 2007 Border Governors Joint Declaration.

BORDER CROSSINGS AND COMMERCE

The members of the Border Legislative Conference unanimously adopted the following statements regarding border crossings and commerce:

- Encourage United States border states, in coordination with the United States Department of Homeland Security and other relevant federal entities, to enter into Memorandum of Agreements to implement enhanced drivers licenses programs;
- Request that United States federal agencies fully staff existing border crossings to reduce border waits;

- Request federal highway agencies in both Mexico and the United States to enhance their efforts to fully fund and conduct coordinated planning of infrastructure projects that improve mobility of people and goods along border ports of entries and their linkage to trade corridors in both countries;
- Support efforts by United States and Mexico border states aimed at harmonizing rail and highway corridors policies to enable efficient connectivity, coordination and security of the movement of people and goods among both nations; and
- Encourage U.S. – Mexico border states to introduce the “Secure Manufacturing Zones Act.” The initiative would complement federal programs aimed at enhancing security and safety cross-border shipment of goods by providing eligible businesses within the state with tax incentives for investment to enhance supply chain visibility of their operations; valued added trade; and efficient operations.

AGRICULTURE

The members of the Border Legislative Conference unanimously adopted the following declarations regarding agriculture:

- Encourage state and federal agricultural agencies in the United States and Mexico to develop quantitative and qualitative frameworks to promote the development of regional, self-sustainable agricultural policies;
- Promote planning frameworks for reciprocal benefits that strengthen a competitive agriculture economy;
- Promote the development of sustainable higher education agricultural programs among border states;
- Develop Agriculture Work Group as part of the Border Legislative Conference to work with agriculture stakeholders along the border region;
- Promote state and federal agriculture entities to conduct binational agro-terrorism exercises;
- Promote the establishment of Memorandum of Agreements among public and private universities along the border region to establish cooperative partnerships; cross-border information sharing and research and binational agriculture programs.