

**TESTIMONY OF JONATHAN W. LINES**  
**YUMA COUNTY SUPERVISOR (DISTRICT 2)**  
**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY**

**September 20, 2023**

**“The Financial Costs of Mayorkas’ Open Border”**

Good morning Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson and members of the Committee. My name is Jonathan Lines, and I am a lifelong resident of Yuma, Arizona, where I currently serve on the County Board of Supervisors. My community is situated as close at some points as 2 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border, which has allowed me to witness firsthand the devastating effects of the Biden-Harris administration’s reckless open-border policies.

I’m grateful for the opportunity to share with each of you this morning the impact these policies have had on the community I’ve called home my entire life. As a County Supervisor in Yuma, I have a broad understanding of the financial – and human – costs that are associated with our open border with Mexico.

**Financial Impact on Yuma’s \$4 Billion Agriculture Industry**

One of the industries that is most impacted is also one of the most important industries in Arizona: agriculture.

Indeed, agriculture is the Number One industry in Yuma County as our farms produce many of the fruits and vegetables that are distributed throughout North America. In fact, more than 91 percent of the leafy greens (romaine, lettuce and spinach) consumed in the United States and Canada from Thanksgiving through Easter are grown, processed and shipped from farms in the Yuma growing region. This industry ultimately brings in more than \$4 billion to the community each year.

The surge in illegal immigration has had a devastating effect on this critical industry in Arizona. The people crossing illegally travel on foot through– and urinate & defecate in– fields and irrigation canals of the farms after they cross the border, which ruins whatever crop is growing on that particular farm. Farmers must abide by stringent food safety rules and this trespass and defecating in production areas renders the crops grown completely unmarketable, thus the crop is destroyed, and farmers must bear this staggering loss. As a result, farmers in Yuma have had to invest millions since this Administration took office in crop loss, to hire security and build fences around their farms to protect our nation’s food supply. We find it bitterly ironic that private citizens must build fences literally yards away from the US Border fence, when the materials to finish were paid for, delivered, but a cease and desist order was given immediately after

Biden's inauguration, and we saw the materials every day stacked at the ready, but untouched for a purposely unfinished fence with huge gaps and people pouring across threatening our livelihoods.) And now this Biden-Harris Administration instead are selling off –at a loss–the materials at the border which were purchased and designated to be used to construct a finished border wall. We must prevent more devastating loss of time and staggering expense in recall of produce or plowing under acres of crops upon discovery of human fecal matter, and footprints or migrant trash.

If we don't stop the flood of illegal immigrants coming across the border and trampling over the crops in Yuma, the situation – and costs – will only worsen for the farming families that fuel this critical industry, and feed so many Americans.

### **Human Trafficking Increases in Yuma County**

While I want to stay focused on the financial costs associated with our open border, I would be remiss if I did not bring up the human tragedy that is unfolding at our Southern Border.

I serve as the president on the board of directors for an organization in Yuma called Amberly's Place, which provides an innovative, multi-disciplinary approach to the investigation, prosecution and intervention of cases of child sexual and/or physical abuse, domestic violence, elder abuse, sexual assault and human trafficking.

What we've seen at Amberly's Place is a sharp increase in the number of people who are self-identifying as being trafficked. While we will work with any law enforcement organization that operates in Yuma County, we currently only have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the law enforcement agencies in Mexico. What that unfortunately means for Amberly's Place is that we can't always do much to help all of these victims of human trafficking. Once someone is brought into Amberly's Place, it's often revealed that the victims' traffickers are located south of the border, in Mexico, which really limits what our law enforcement agencies are able to do regarding justice for these victims treated in Yuma.

Each year, anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 children are trafficked through Yuma County. As you can see, the negative impacts of our open border are more than just financial. Real trauma and abuse is occurring every day in my community, and it's a travesty each time we find ourselves unable to provide justice for these victims who have been trafficked by members of the transnational cartels and their allies, while our community must bear the brunt of the costs of medical treatment, counseling and therapy, for the thousands of victims seeking help in Yuma.

What's more, you have to keep in mind just how dangerous of a place the desert can be for the migrants making their illegal journey into the United States. Last year alone, the local coroner responded to 70 deaths in the Yuma County desert. Not only does that tell us that 70 migrant lives were lost, it also highlights how Yuma County is bearing the burden of our open border. So far this year we have 20 deaths discovered in the desert, cause of death year after year ranges from homicide, disease, injuries in accidents, to deadly heat exposure.

## **Food Banks**

Yuma County is an already-stressed community, where 25 percent of our population receives government assistance on a monthly basis. That statistic alone should tell you just how important our community's food banks are. I serve as the Chairman on the Board of Directors of the Yuma Community Food Bank, and our organization is absolutely feeling the effects of the open border.

In addition to the regular demand for food from members of the community that we are used to serving, there has been a very dramatic uptick in demand from people traveling through Yuma County. More and more people are asking for what we call "travel packs," which indicates that these folks aren't planning to stay in Yuma – but are in need of food and other necessities.

We can't always help every person who comes through the Food Bank's doors. In fact, you must be currently registered in our system in order to receive support from the Yuma Community Food Bank. This is why we partner with 17 other non-government organizations (NGOs) to ensure we're meeting the needs of the people in Yuma. We support each of these 17 organizations with food and other supplies, which has certainly strained our resources over the last 18 months or so as each of these organizations have seen increases in demand.

About 14 months ago, our Governor at the time, Doug Ducey, was able to offset the increased demand at the Food Bank by sending us three semi-trucks full of food and other supplies. We have also received in that time about 500,000 pounds of food from the LDS Church in Salt Lake City, which has helped offset some of the challenges we're facing in Yuma.

While we are undoubtedly grateful for the support from Governor Ducey and the LDS Church, it's clear that the level of demand for our services at the Yuma Community Food Bank is not sustainable.

## **Crime and its Impact on First Responders**

Another cost associated with the open border we need to bring to your attention comes from the emergency services that are provided by the small municipalities along the border. As you can imagine, there has been a major increase in 911 calls all along the border – and oftentimes, these are small police departments that are responding to every call. This is a major burden for small border towns like San Luis or Somerton to bear.

Not only do these small police departments have to respond to each 911 call, they also have to deal with the various crimes upon citizens that are being committed (in addition to just crossing the border illegally). When I talked to the Yuma County Sheriff Leon Wilmont earlier this month, I learned that these crimes can range from sexual abuse

against minors to burglaries to assaults, and many other dangerous crimes as well as destruction or theft of property.

This should come as no surprise when you understand just how many people are crossing the border illegally. Between October 1 of last year and the morning of September 6 of this year, U.S. Border Patrol agents had encountered over 2.2 million migrants along the Southwest portion of the border. This number also includes over 126,000 unaccompanied minors who have crossed the border illegally. These people have come from all over the world, representing over 106 different countries. But the most common countries these migrants are coming from are: Venezuela, Guatemala, Honduras, Columbia, Cuba and now Africa and China, as of this year.

Again, going back to October 1 of last year, there had been 645 reported deaths as of September 6 of this year. This chilling statistic is a dark reminder of the humanitarian crisis that is far too often ignored by this administration. Life is precious, and far too many people are risking their lives – and oftentimes their children’s lives, and personal well-being – bargaining at tremendous cost financially and in sexual access with members of criminal cartels to arrange to come to this country illegally.

Indeed, the human cost of our open border is massive. I know all of you are very aware of the fentanyl crisis we are facing across this country. But what you might not know is that the human cost associated with fentanyl is 19 times greater in Yuma County when compared to the rest of the nation. This deadly drug is pouring across the border, and it has a disproportionate impact on the communities closest to the border.

### **Impact on Yuma’s Medical Facilities**

Many of the first responders end up transporting these illegal immigrants to the local hospital, which brings about another huge financial cost that is often overlooked. Within the Yuma sector of the border, Yuma Regional Medical Center is the only medical facility that is in close proximity to the border – and you can only imagine the impact this border crisis has had on the hospital.

Under federal law, Yuma Regional Medical Center is required to provide care to every illegal immigrant who comes through its doors – but the hospital is rarely paid for its services. According to Dr. Robert Trenchel, who is the president and CEO of Yuma Regional Medical Center, the hospital provided about \$26 million worth of medical care to migrants within an 18-month period – and they received \$0 in return.

As a result of this border crisis, Yuma’s only hospital is struggling to remain viable. Can you imagine a community with over 200,000 people without a hospital? The residents of Yuma are already feeling the impact, too. Many times there are long wait times in the Emergency Room and delivery room, due to beds and doctors maxxed to capacity, which has forced some Yuma residents to travel several hours to San Diego or Phoenix to have surgery or deliver a baby. This, in my opinion, is unacceptable.

## **Impact on Military Readiness**

Meanwhile, let us not forget that Yuma is also where a lot of military training occurs. Not only are we home to the Marine Corps Air Station Yuma and the U.S. Army Yuma Proving Ground, but the military is considered the second largest contributor to the local economy after agriculture.

In a recent conversation with MCAS-Yuma's chief of security, I learned that the uncontrolled and unregulated migration of illegal immigrants has interfered with critical military training. Without even knowing it, many of these illegal migrants are putting their lives in grave danger as they end up crossing through our military ranges while on their way to the City of Yuma.

As a result, this border crisis has a negative impact on our military's readiness – especially if these migrants continue to interfere with our live-fire and munitions training. Again, this is a huge consequence of the Biden-Harris administration's cruel open-border policies – and we in Yuma on so many levels of many industries are having to pay a disproportionately high price.

## **Conclusion**

In the coming weeks ahead, we're going to hear a lot about the sheer number of migrants who have crossed into the United States illegally as the fiscal year is about to come to an end. While those numbers are sure to be staggering, I hope the information I presented today gives each of you additional context to better understand the severity of this border crisis.

My community happens to be on the front lines, but let us not forget that this border crisis affects all 50 states, and if we don't act soon to secure our southern border, the financial – and human – costs of this ongoing policy failure and inhumane tragedy will only continue to climb.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to appear before this Committee today, and I want to thank each of you for taking the time to better understand the impacts of this administration's disastrous open-border policies. With that, I'm happy to take any questions that you might have.