



Southern Poverty Law Center
400 Washington Ave
Montgomery, AL 36104
splcactionfund.org

Statement by the Southern Poverty Law Center

Submitted to the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources,
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

In connection with its April 10, 2024 hearing entitled:

“Biden’s Border Crisis: Examining the Impacts of International Cartels
Targeting Indian Country”

Submitted April 17, 2024



Introduction

On behalf of the Southern Poverty Law Center, we write to provide our insights on issues discussed during the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations April 10, 2024, hearing entitled “Biden’s Border Crisis: Examining the Impacts of International Cartels Targeting Indian Country.” We appreciate the opportunity to share our expertise on the issue and one of the witnesses called to testify. We would ask that this statement be included as part of the Subcommittee’s formal hearing record.

Established in 1971, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) is a nonprofit organization founded in Montgomery, Alabama, to help ensure the promise of the Civil Rights Movement became a reality for all, particularly for Black communities in the South, who are all too often the victims of discriminatory policies and who experience targeted violence at the hands of white supremacists. We work in partnership with communities of color to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements through transformative policies and initiatives, and advance the human rights of all people.

Background

SPLC works to track, monitor, and expose organized hate and extremism in the U.S. As part of this mission, SPLC [tracks anti-immigrant hate groups](#) and documented 17 of these groups in 2022. One witness [invited to testify](#) at the hearing on April 10 was Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies at the [Center for Immigration Studies](#), (CIS). SPLC designates CIS as an anti-immigrant hate group.

Based in Washington, D.C., CIS serves as one of the leading anti-immigrant think tanks in the country. The group is known for producing reports warning of the dangers of mass immigration and making claims of high levels of criminality of immigrants that have been debunked elsewhere. The group has [repeatedly circulated white nationalist and antisemitic writers](#) in its weekly newsletter and commissioned a policy analyst who had previously been pushed out of the conservative Heritage Foundation for embracing racist pseudoscience.

CIS was founded in 1985 by the late [John Tanton](#), a white nationalist and eugenicist who is credited as the architect of the modern-day anti-immigrant movement. Tanton sought to limit immigration to preserve a white majority in the U.S., as [revealed by a cache](#) of his personal memos. He founded a network of organizations to carry out his vision by pushing anti-immigrant policies and derailing meaningful immigration reform. He established CIS as an independent think tank to help give legitimacy to his network’s agenda.

Vaughan is a longtime staffer with CIS and has contributed to the group’s misinformation and obfuscation of the immigration debate. For example, Vaughan often decries the humanitarian Temporary Protected Status program, which provides relief for thousands of individuals who have fled war-torn nations and countries dealing with natural disasters, and falsely blamed it for



an increase in crime in the U.S. She has previously discussed her work with *The American Free Press*, an antisemitic newspaper founded by noted Holocaust denier [Willis Carto](#).

Vaughan used her remarks on April 10 to suggest that, under the Biden administration, the U.S. border has been turned into “a chaotic, dangerous and seemingly lawless frontier.” She lamented the relaxing of draconian immigration enforcement policies implemented during the Trump administration, like enforcement of Title 42, which was put in place during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, and Migrant Protection Protocols, or the “Remain in Mexico” policy, which has sent over 70,000 people seeking asylum to face dangerous conditions and potential abuses in Mexico while they wait for their immigration court hearings. She advocated expanding problematic 287(g) programs, which entangle local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement and have been riddled with abuse, discrimination, racial profiling, and violations of many people’s constitutional rights.

One of the other harms Vaughan said to be affecting American communities, including “Indian Country,” is Biden administration efforts seeking to halt construction of the U.S.-Mexico border wall. Some Tribal nations and leaders, however, have joined the [Borderlands Advocates coalition](#), along with environmental groups like the Sierra Club, in opposing a wall, calling it an “affront to human and civil rights and to our vibrant border communities and borderlands.” Some anti-immigrant groups seek to blame environmental issues on immigrants and migration. But as noted by Borderlands Advocates, “[t]hese barriers block wildlife migration, cause flooding and damage pristine wild lands, including wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, and national forests.” The coalition instead [advocates](#) for comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship as a real way of addressing the complex issues at the border.

During the hearing on April 10, Rep. Delia Ramirez asked Vaughan if she believes in the racist “[great replacement](#)” theory, a conspiracy narrative which claims there is an active, ongoing, and covert effort to displace and replace white people in western nations with people of color and non-white immigrants. Mass murderers who have carried out violence in places like El Paso, Texas, Christchurch, New Zealand, Buffalo, New York, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania have cited this conspiracy theory as inspiration for their attacks. Vaughan responded that she was unaware of the concept. Yet, groups that operate in the same network as CIS have [long pushed](#) anti-immigration ideas akin to the great replacement.

Rep. Ramirez also pressed Vaughan about her repeated peddling ideas of there being a migrant “invasion” happening at the U.S.-Mexico border. This rhetoric aligns with great replacement ideas by framing migrants and asylum seekers, most of whom are from Central and South America, as being some kind of violent enemy which must be met with militaristic force. Vaughan responded, “I don’t use that term, it’s not appropriate.” But as [reported](#) by the immigration advocacy group America’s Voice, Vaughan is documented using the term “invasion” on social media. For example, in 2018, she re-shared an article claiming, “Trump has full constitutional power to stop the border invasion.” Invasion rhetoric also appears in articles published on CIS’s website.

America’s Voice has [documented](#) other members of the House Committee on Natural Resources amplifying similar “invasion” rhetoric.



This is not the first time Vaughan or a CIS staffer has been invited to testify before a Congressional committee. It remains important to highlight CIS's harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric and agenda when they are given a prominent, prestigious platform. And while it is fundamental within democratic principles to debate immigration policy, dehumanizing rhetoric should play no part in that debate.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement as part of the Subcommittee's formal hearing record. For more information about SPLC's work to ensure that our country safeguards our nation's longstanding promise of opportunity and safety to arriving immigrants and that immigrants are treated fairly, equally, and with dignity, please contact Michael Lieberman, Senior Policy Counsel, Michael.Lieberman@splcenter.org.