



January 29th, 2024

Re: Border Crisis and its impact on North and South Dakota

North Dakota and South Dakota Congressional Delegate,

My name is Jesse Jahner, and I am the elected Sheriff of Cass County, North Dakota. Cass County has a population of approximately 186,562 citizens. The Cass County Sheriff's Office has approximately 235 employee positions, and the Cass County Jail houses 348 Inmates. Currently, our jail is over capacity, and many of those capacity issues are related to addiction, mental health, and homelessness. There are two major highways that run through Cass County: Interstate 94, which travels east and west, and Interstate 29, which travels north and south, connecting North Dakota and Cass County to the Canadian border.

Over the past year, I have had the honor and privilege of serving as the President of the Dakota Territories Sheriff's Association. The Dakota Territories Sheriff's Association represents all 119 Sheriffs in the states of North and South Dakota. I write this letter on behalf of the Dakota Territories Sheriff's Association and the Sheriff's represented by the Association. This letter expresses our concerns as North Dakota and South Dakota Sheriffs over border security in this country on both the northern and southern borders. This letter is not written to define a political agenda, political lines, or political divisions as it relates to border security but to address concerns as they relate to public safety, strains on our criminal justice system, narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, and homelessness in our country and communities.

Oftentimes, when people think of the "border crisis," they immediately think that border security only concerns the southern parts of the United States. Although these areas have been largely impacted and have experienced significant changes in their community's safety, narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, and violence, we in North Dakota and South Dakota are starting to see changes in our communities as it relates to these same issues. In North and South Dakota, we are seeing rises in narcotics trafficking and overdoses, a rise in mental health and addiction-related crimes, and homelessness, all of which are placing huge strains on our public safety infrastructure, including mental health and addiction services and incarceration capacity issues.

The Cass County Sheriff's Office, along with other Sheriffs in North and South Dakota, have staff assigned to local state and federal drug task forces. The staff I have assigned to operate in these capacities continually see narcotics trafficked into our area from the southern border. These narcotics are either directly trafficked from the southern border or make their way up to larger city hubs like Chicago, Minneapolis, and Denver and are then trafficked into our communities and reservations. In Cass County alone in 2023, Task Force Investigators and Detectives have seized and have directly linked 46.67 lbs. of methamphetamine, 10.2 lbs. of fentanyl-laced M-30 pills, 6.95 lbs. of heroin, 6.23 lbs. of cocaine, 3.40 lbs. of mushrooms, and 2.11 lbs. of fentanyl powder to the southern border. In North and South Dakota, collectively, we have seen a steady rise in fentanyl trafficked into our communities. In 2021, North Dakota Statewide Task Forces seized 6,507 M-30 pills and 1,496 grams of powder fentanyl. In 2022, those numbers increased to 76,122 M-30 pills and 1,749 grams of fentanyl powder. In the state of South Dakota in 2021, they recorded 3,098 grams of fentanyl products statewide, and that number jumped to 8,568 grams of fentanyl-laced products in 2022. In addition, overdose deaths have become a huge concern in our communities. In North Dakota, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, 2022 statistics, opioid overdose deaths have totaled 518, heroin-related overdose deaths have totaled 45, and Fentanyl overdose deaths have totaled 110. In South Dakota in 2022, according to the South Dakota Department of Health and Vital Statistics, opioid overdose deaths totaled 45, and fentanyl deaths totaled 35. As we have just closed out 2023, we expect those numbers to be just as alarming. These statistics, narcotic seizures, and overdose deaths show how important a border security policy is in order to try and prevent these narcotics from entering the United States.

Additionally, we are aware and extremely concerned over the increased threats of terrorist attacks and potential violence towards our communities from those crossing the border. We understand through intelligence briefings that these threats are at an all-time high, and it's not a question of if something is going to happen; it's a matter of when, how big of an impact it will have, and how many of our citizens will be affected.

All of these concerns and consequences stemming from an open border have put extreme strains on this country's public safety infrastructure. The Federal Government is failing to put the safety and security of its citizens at the forefront, and we would like it to stop. As both governmental and elected officials, we are all responsible for providing the proper infrastructure to keep our communities and country safe. We are asking you to help us protect those we serve. Many people have entered this country legally, and we stand by that process and those who choose to follow the law in doing so. In these instances, law-abiding individuals follow a structured legal process to become United States Citizens, a process where we can monitor who is coming into our communities, allowing law enforcement the ability to maintain law and order, safety, and security.

Finally, the way the federal government is currently allowing entry on the southern border and its lack of policy and structure in doing so has caused strains at our northern border. Federal resources are being pulled from the northern border to assist at the southern border because of the Federal Government's lack of planning for additional resources needed to secure both borders. This puts additional strains on North Dakota's northern bordering counties and law enforcement assigned to patrolling those areas. This leads to fewer resources and longer response times for citizens living in those areas when they contact law enforcement for public safety services.

The Dakota Territories Sheriff's Association supports a structured border security plan or policy and the proper resources allocated to secure both the northern and southern borders of this country so that we can protect our citizens and stop these activities that are putting strains on our public safety infrastructure and putting American Citizens at risk.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jesse Jahner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Jesse Jahner

Sheriff Cass County, North Dakota

Immediate past President of the Dakota Territories Sheriff's Association