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Life on the Border: Examining Border Security through the Eyes of Local Residents and Law
Enforcement
Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security
May 9, 2016

I. Introduction

Chair McSally and members of the committee, I am Mark Adams, a Presbyterian pastor serving with the bi-national ministry Frontera de Cristo, based in Douglas, AZ/Agua Prieta, Sonora. I lived the first eighteen years of my life on the South Carolina/North Carolina border and for the past 18 years I have lived on the US/Mexico border in Douglas, AZ/Agua Prieta, Sonora. While I crossed the South Carolina/North Carolina border at frequently growing up, I cross the US/Mexico border almost daily and sometimes up to four times a day. I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Committee about life on the border.

In 1998, I migrated to the Douglas/Agua Prieta to serve with the church. I did not realize before coming that political and economic forces had converted our towns and surrounding areas into the primary crossing point for persons entering the United States without proper documentation.

The church of the US/Mexico borderlands has been in a unique position to witness to the growing division, fear, and death occurring on our shared border as well as in the interiors of our nations. It is in this context of tension and suffering that I and all those who are Christian are called to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ who “is our peace who has made the two one and who has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.” (Ephesians 2:14).

Being part of the church that crosses national, political, social, linguistic, and cultural borders has enabled us to experience the suffering on both sides of the border—whether it is crying with family members in Mexico who have lost loved ones in the deserts or listening to the frustration of property owners in the US who have lost a sense of physical and financial security because of persons crossing through their property; whether celebrating in worship with migrants who give witness to how God saved their lives again or praying with Border Patrol agents who sometimes fear for their safety; or grieving with families on both sides of the border as they struggle with the violence of an underground drug culture. Because we are in relationship with people on multiple sides of the “issues” and have become familiar with the realities and complexity of the situation, it has become impossible for us to scapegoat any group of people.

As Christians we are called to work together across national boundaries and to address our common concerns as sisters and brothers equally created in the Divine image. We are not adversaries. Furthermore, we are called to resist the temptation to demonize or dehumanize any individual or group of individuals. By building relationships and understanding across borders, those most affected by the brokenness of current policies can unite to struggle for change that is beneficial to people on both sides of the border.

II. The Importance of Remembering Our History

Each year we host around 500 people from churches, seminaries, universities, schools and leadership organizations as part of our mission education ministry. Over the last year, we have hosted:

young and old;

progressive, liberal, conservative , libertarian and a mixture of political philosophies;

Presbyterian, Jewish, Muslim, Catholic , Agnostic, Atheist, Mennonite, Episcopalian,; Methodist, Inquiring and Skeptical;

One of our main goals in our ministry in general and specifically in our mission education ministry is to build relationships and understanding across borders. As part of our orientation, we go to a spot just north of the US/Mexico border and stand in the shadow of the tall multi-million dollar rusted steel fence that we as a government built in 2012 as part of the border infrastructure after the original “aesthetic” fence initially erected in 1997 was torn down.

While standing there, we ask folks to share a part of who they are: their names, where they were born, where they live now and where their ancestors came from before they came to what is now the United States of America and why their ancestors came. It is an exercise of remembrance . . .remembering our own immigrant stories, because we are a people who so easily forget.

It hardly ever ceases to amaze me the diversity that emerges. As we remember our origins: Ireland, Italy, the West Coast of Africa, China, Germany, Poland, Japan, I simultaneously rejoice in the reality that we are a nation of immigrants with the Statue of Liberty as one of our enduring symbols and remember that many of our ancestors were welcomed not with the sentiment of the Emma Lazarus poem “give me the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free . . .” that forms one of the highest ideals of our who we are as a nation, but rather with the crass xenophobia that also has strong currents within our national identity. .

Roy Goodman is a colleague on the border shocked me one day with a t-shirt he was wearing. On the t-shirt it had two proud symbols of our country: the US flag and the Statue of Liberty. Underneath these symbols: there was a quote that said:

"'Few of their Children in the Country learn English... The Signs in our Streets have Inscriptions in both Languages, and in some places only [their language]... In short, unless the Stream of their Importation could be turned... they will soon so outnumber us, that all the advantages we have, will not in my Opinion be able to preserve our Language, and even our Government will become precarious."¹

"Roy, how could you wear that horrible t-shirt?" I asked in disbelief, feeling as if he was betraying our work of building bridges between peoples.

"You know who said that?" he responded. "Benjamin Franklin. He was talking about the Germans in Pennsylvania."

The 15% of the US population that can trace part of its lineage back to Germany² is probably very glad that neither the Native Americans, nor the colonies nor the young US government later had a quota in the eighteenth century of deporting 400,000 people a year that some of our founders and I imagine many of the populace thought did not belong in our nation. In hindsight it is easy to see the misguided nature of the parts of our history that include the oppression, exclusion and/or fear of immigrant peoples because of their racial, ethnic, cultural, or national origin: whether forced immigrants brought to our shores as slaves, or the Irish who "needed not to apply" (ironically I have often heard the vehicles used by our Border Patrol to Transport people who have been apprehended as Paddy Wagons), or the Chinese who were the first group of people legally targeted by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, but the cliché often is true: history repeats itself.

As you seek to fulfill your responsibilities as members of the Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee, I urge you, to remember, remember not to be guided by the basest of our nature which often fears the other, remember that we are a nation of immigrants, that when we are at our best we believe that "all men [and women] are created equal", and that E Pluribus Unum. I urge you to help us on the border and throughout the nation to secure a legacy of truly being a nation of immigrants that respects the human rights of all; help us to live into the reality that we can be a city on a hill.

III. Meaning of Borders

¹ Excerpt from a letter to Peter Collinson from Benjamin Franklin written May 9, 1753.

² According to US Census Data

http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=DEC_00_SF3_PCT018&prodType=table

What Do Borders Mean to You?

While still standing in the shadow of the twenty-foot tall multi-million dollar rusted fence that has come to define much of our border with Mexico, I ask our visiting delegations: “What do borders mean to you?”

I intentionally make borders plural, because borders exist in their own communities: the border between property, or neighborhoods, or town and county or states. However, standing in the shadow of what Pete Vogel, an immigrant from Germany and good friend of Frontera de Cristo, calls our “Berlin Wall”, people’s responses are almost always focused on the meaning of the US/Mexico border. Some common themes are: a division of hostility; a separation of us from them; an effort of the rich to keep from the poor.

One of our visitors said: “There is something that I really don’t like about the wall . . .but what if it did not exist, wouldn’t everyone just come to the United States.”

For some it is hard to remember that for almost 150 years between the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe and the beginning of the massive border infrastructure build-up during the Clinton Administration in the mid 1990’s, there was no multi-million dollar taxpayer funded steel fence between us and our neighbors to the south, nor was there massive camera surveillance, nor drones, nor miles of multi-million dollar high speed all-purpose roads paralleling the border, nor the over 21,000 Border Patrol Agents that we have today³. It is amazing for me to hear some politicians speak today as if we as a nation have done nothing to “secure our border”.

I am often invited to speak in different venues in the interior of the US and almost always ask people what they think of when they think of the border. Much like the majority of the visitors with us, the border has negative connotations for most of the people on the interior with whom I talk. I have people who question why I would ever choose to live on the border and others who ask if I am afraid.

The meaning and implications of borders change and mean different things to different people. The political, cultural, demographic, and economic context of our nation always determines the meaning and implications of our borders. The border between the United States and Mexico has a very different meaning with starkly different implications in 2016 than it did when its most recent demarcation was set by the Gadsden Purchase over 150 years ago.

When the border between the United States and Mexico was finalized in the 1850s, it was a political border that marked where the spheres of influence and power of the United States and

³ According to CBP website <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/overview>

Mexico began and ended, not the heavily fortified border that divides communities and families today.

So what does the border mean to me?

It means home.

With all of its joys and suffering, its opportunities and challenges, the border is my home and it is home to over 12 million people along the US/Mexico border. I think that those who have made the laws and policies regarding border security have often forgotten that the border is home to millions of people. Too often the voice of a few border residents claiming that the border is “out of control” and needs to be secured is given more importance than the voices of the broad spectrum of our community who understand that cross border economic, cultural and social cooperation is our life-blood and the safe and efficient flow of people through our ports of entry is essential.

Our efforts at “border security” have often impeded our community security and have had a detrimental impact on the poor as well as people of color.

I urge you as you go about the tasks of your committee to please remember that the border is our home, it is not a place to be militarized, but rather a place to be revitalized.

IV. Increased Border Security and Its Broad Consequences

For 150 years there had been a pretty fluid border between U.S. and Mexico. For most of our history, crossing the US/Mexico border was not too unlike crossing the North Carolina/South Carolina border. Beginning in the 1990s, things changed dramatically for us on the border and the border began to be more robustly enforced through efforts like Operation Hold The Line, Operation Gatekeeper and Operation Safeguard. Our change in border policy corresponded economic forces that were pulling people north to the United States (low unemployment and demand for labor) and pushing people north from Mexico (dramatic loss of agricultural jobs) People were forced to cross through the desert areas of Agua Prieta/Douglas, Arizona in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but by the mid- and late- 2000s the flow of migration was pushed to even more remote and deadly areas like the deserts and mountains east of Yuma and the Altar Valley southwest of Tucson.

With the signing of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 , President Clinton began a massive increase in the budget for border protection. Under the Bush and Obama administrations, we have continued the policy of increasing the budget and the number of Border Patrol agents.

Unlike the Immigration Reform and Control Act signed by President Reagan in 1986 that provided a pathway to legalization for persons who were in the United States without authorization prior to the Act, Clinton's "reform" provided no such relief and only focused on the removal of persons in the United States without authorization and the deterrence of future undocumented immigrants.

Has the strategy been effective? Despite our attempts to "secure" the border, the presence of undocumented immigrants in the United States is millions more now than it was when we began Operation Gatekeeper in 1994.

In 1994, I was teaching Spanish in my hometown of Clover, South Carolina just south of the North Carolina border. Other than myself and one other non-native Spanish-speaking teacher, there were no other Spanish-speaking persons in town. I went back there ten years later, in 2004. Ten years after we started beefing up our border security programs and implementing Operation Gatekeeper, there was a large banner decorated with Mexican and Guatemalan flags hanging from the roof of the Piggly Wiggly grocery store, with the words: "Tenemos productos hispanos"—we have Hispanic products. The First Baptist church was offering free English as a Second Language classes. At the bank, a sign asked if you wanted service in English or Spanish. In ten years, Clover, South Carolina had gone from having two non-native Spanish-speaking people to having a sizeable enough population that grocery stores and banks were marketing to them and churches were reaching out to them.

And this anecdote could be repeated in many towns, suburbs and cities throughout the United States, precisely at a time when our government decided to get serious about enforcing the border.

In 1994, there were 4.5 million undocumented persons in the U.S. Now, after spending billions of dollars to "secure" the border, there are more than 11 million—the number had increased to over 12 million prior to the recession that began in 2008.

There has been other serious and even deadly consequences to our decision to pursue a border enforcement strategy that uses the deserts and mountains as lethal deterrents without considering the power of the economic and family push and pull factors.

A. Increased Death and Injury

Since the inception of Operation Gatekeeper in 1994, more than three times more people have died in the deserts of the southwest while seeking to reach the "American Dream" than the number of persons who died in the attacks of 9/11. More people have died crossing the US/Mexico border trying to provide a livelihood for their families than the combined number of US soldiers who have died in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Since 1994, over 7,000 bodies

have been found. That doesn't include the deaths of persons whose bodies have never been found.

Each Tuesday at 5:15 pm, a group gathers 5 blocks north of the border for the Healing Our Borders Vigil in which we remember the persons by name who have died in Cochise County while crossing, we pray for their families, we pray for an end to deaths in the desert, we pray for our government and the government of Mexico and we recommit ourselves to work for healthier relationships among our peoples and countries.

Our policy of using the deserts and mountains as lethal deterrents and increasing height of fencing have also resulted in a significant increase in the number of persons sustaining traumatic physical injuries while crossing the border. In addition to the intense suffering experienced by the migrants who have not been deterred by our policies that intentionally increase the risk for their crossing, border hospitals have experienced financial and emotional stress as they receive more patients with broken bones or severe complications from hypothermia and hyperthermia. The increasing number of life-threatening and life-altering injuries also has a psychological impact on our agents who are tasked with securing our borders, as they are often the first responders to migrants with compound fractures, severe dehydration and other painful physical conditions.

One of our ministries is the Migrant Resource Center, which is the first non-governmental building that you arrive to when you enter Agua Prieta by foot. In June we will celebrate our 10th Anniversary of providing a safe place for men, women and children who have been returned to Mexico by our Border Patrol. In that time, we have welcomed over 86,000 men, women and children. Together with our partners at the Kino Initiative in Nogales who have welcomed many more people and especially now that almost all repatriation is happening through Nogales we can testify about the physical and emotional trauma of our broken border and immigration system.

I met Guillerma in the Migrant Resource Center.

“Hey Marcos, she's from South Carolina!”

Adrian Gonzalez one of the volunteers pulled on my shoulder and announced excitedly the news that another one of my “paisanos” was less than seven feet away from me. We were both in the Migrant Resource Center, yet we were miles apart in the reasons for finding ourselves in the center.

I turned and saw a woman not too much younger than me standing in dark clothes and a baseball cap shading a hint of deep sadness in her face. 60% of the skin on her hands had been scrapped off as she slid down the posts of our border fence.

“Buenos dias! Me llamo Marcos, como se llama Ud.?” I asked, assuming that this fellow Sandlapper’s first language was Spanish.

“My name is Guillermina,” she responded in perfect English. Guillermina, had moved to South Carolina about the time I moved to Agua Prieta. She had been living in Myrtle Beach for 10 years, working in a hotels and restaurants—the irony of her working in the hospitality industry is a painful reality. She loves living in South Carolina despite not always feeling welcome, she has had work to help feed her family—Jose, her husband, and Kevin, her 6 year old son.

She had not seen her dad in more than 16 years and had crossed back to Mexico because her dad had had a heart attack. Tears welled up in her eyes and in the eyes of most of us gathered in that humbled building.

With her voice trembling, she said, “When I left, he said,

‘Hija’ this will probably be the last time we see each other. Be a good mother to my grandson. I love you.’

My world is torn in two—my dad is on this side of the border and my son and husband are over on the other side.”

Pastor Brandi Casto Waters of First PC Greer, SC, who was visiting us that day led us all in prayer with and for Guillermina and we joined together in the hope for the day when the border would be a place of encounter and peace and not a place of division and conflict.

As I left, I let Guillermina know that I had a son Kevin’s age and that I would keep them in my prayers, I also let her know that I and the ministry with whom I serve are committed to continue the hard work of changing laws that tears worlds apart. I asked her if she would like me to share her story with you—“please ask them to pray for us.”

On November 20, 2014 President Obama announced an executive order that will provide an opportunity for almost 4 million parents like Guillermina to come out of the shadows and not have to live in fear of being separated from their children. I know that most on the committee disagree with the policy and that it is being challenged in court. I also know that it is an imperfect solution, and Congress needs to act to align our laws more with the gospel’s call to radical hospitality and with Emma Lazarus’ words on one of the iconic symbols of our nation: “give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

B. Use of Force

In addition to the deaths and injury due to the increased physical challenges of crossing in more remote and perilous places, there has also been an increase of deaths and injury due to use of force. We urge you to advocate for the full implementation of the February 2013 PERF report and that this committee demand that CBP become more transparent and accountable and implement a complaint filing process that is accessible and effective.

C. Boon to the Smuggling Industry

An irony of our increased border enforcement is that it has been accompanied by an increase in the size, sophistication, and wealth of smuggling operations on both sides of the border. Smuggling of drugs and people is a growth industry. In its working paper “Analysis of Migrant Smuggling Costs Along the Southwest Border,” the Department of Homeland Security⁴ provides data tracking the increased costs of smuggling with the increase of border enforcement. The data presented in the DHS paper corresponds closely with the information of the local residents in Agua Prieta with whom I have talked over the years. According to them, the cost to get across the border has risen from \$50 to \$100 prior to 1994, if a smuggler was needed at all, to \$800 in 1998 when I first arrived on the border, to \$2000 or more today— with a much higher risk of being caught, injured or killed. The DHS’s working paper states that the increased costs for smuggling are only a “potential deterrent.”

D. Strained Relationships Between Federal Law Enforcement and Local Communities

I believe that it is essential for both community security and border security that there be a good relationship between the federal law enforcement and local community—more than 85% of the population of Douglas is of Mexican descent and while most are US citizens there are families of mixed legal statuses. Racial profiling is a fear and lived experience for many of our community. Rosie Mendoza, a naturalized citizen originally from Mexico and a member of the board of Frontera de Cristo, shared in a community listening session with Chair McSally in February of 2015 about the experience of her US born sons, who have dark complexions being stopped dozens of times while walking on the street. She said their “crime” is “walking in Douglas while brown.”

In a gathering we arranged for local Douglas business persons and the chief of staff of former Representative Barber, the business owners expressed concern about how they are treated as “guilty until proven innocent” when they are returning to the US from Mexico. Their concern

⁴ <http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois-smuggling-wp.pdf>

was not only for their persons, but also for business in Douglas in general. If they as business owners feel more apprehension coming back into the United States than going into Mexico, how must non-citizens feel and how many people might that feeling prevent from crossing the border to shop in the United States.

In my own family, we experience the tension of experiencing the reality of the border in very different ways. In a recent conversation with a church, my wife, Miriam, and I were asked us a seemingly simple question: "Is it easy for you to cross the border?" Miriam is a permanent resident of the United States and citizen of Mexico of indigenous descent.

We looked at each other knowingly and I asked her to answer the question. "It depends if it's him or me." Our children even experience a difference—our oldest daughter who is 20 has a dark complexion and our youngest two children have lighter complexions. Our oldest daughter has had experiences crossing the border in which she has been yelled at and humiliated, so much that I do not like her to cross the border (north) without me. I will not have the same concern for my two youngest children who are 12 and 8 when they become old enough to cross the border alone.

When we drive through the checkpoint outside of Tombstone, we make sure the I am driving and not my wife—and not because I am a better driver. Almost always when I am driving, we get waved through the checkpoint with "have a good day". When Miriam is driving we almost always get asked citizenship status. Febe, my sister-in-law who has driven through the checkpoint alone, was amazed to see how easy it was when I was driving. "That's white privilege" she chimed in from the back seat.

I was recently in a new local restaurant in Douglas when I heard a Border Patrol agent comment to the waitress that he was glad that there was a new restaurant in Douglas. The waitress asked the agent: ""How many restaurants can Border Patrol agents eat at in Douglas?" While I had known about the reality that Border Patrol Agents did not feel welcome at many of restaurants and had unofficially but actively boycotted a couple, I was surprised to her the Agent's response: "Three."

I think it is incumbent upon us (both we as local residents and our federal law enforcement) to work on strengthening our relationship and growing trust among us. I am proud to have worked with Mayor Ortega, the Douglas City Council and other organizations to have a resolution passed to make Douglas "A Welcoming Community". Initially it was in response to the negative impacts that Arizona's law SB1070 had on relationships with our neighbors to the south. We wanted them to know that Douglas welcomed them. However, as we continued our conversations we realized that we needed to expand our understand of welcome to include the federal law enforcement in our midst.

Currently less than 25% of federal agents stationed in Douglas live in Douglas. Most live in the Sierra Vista area. There are many reasons: lack of housing attractive for agents; of jobs for spouses; of shopping options etc. I believe we both as a local community and as the federal government look for ways to make living in the communities where our agents work a more chosen option. By increasing the percentage of agents living locally, we are more likely to increase our understanding of and trust for one another. When we participate in civic groups together, when our children go to school together or play on the soccer team or take swim lessons, when we worship together, when we celebrate the fourth of July or Douglas Days together, when we get to know one another, it becomes harder to treat one another as enemies.

V. Comprehensive Immigration Reform Is Essential To Border Security

Many politicians have argued that there can be no immigration reform until the border is secure. This is a false dichotomy. Comprehensive immigration reform is actually integral to helping make the border more secure.

The Presbyterian Church has joined the majority of faith traditions advocating for comprehensive immigration reform. The basic elements of the resolution passed at our 216th General Assembly⁵ are:

- a. an opportunity for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria, and, over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens;
- b. reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who currently wait many years to be reunited;
- c. the creation of legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected; and
- d. border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals, as well as pursuing the legitimate task of implementing American immigration policy.

⁵ To see complete resolution and study guide go to http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/acswp/pdf/immigration-resolution.pdf

- e. a call for living wages and safe working conditions for workers of United States owned companies in other countries;
- f. a call for greater economic development in poor countries to decrease the economic desperation, which forces the division of families and migration.

Most of the Border Patrol agents that I have talked to have struggled emotionally with the part of their job that requires them to apprehend men and women who are migrating for economic reasons or to be reunited with family. The persons that they really want to apprehend are the people who are coming into the country with ill-intent, smuggling drugs, or with criminal backgrounds.

By creating a system that would allow for the orderly, safe and efficient flow of persons who are migrating for economic or family reasons through ports of entry and removing them from between ports of entry, we will not only reduce the emotional stress for many of our agents which will increase their job satisfaction and their effectiveness, but also enable them to focus on the real threats to our security.