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One Hundred Seventeenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

March 27, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to express our deep concerns over the growing humanitarian crisis at our southern border. As U.S. Secretary of State, you play a critical role in addressing the crisis, including through granting Circular-175 authority to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and making decisions regarding foreign assistance.

We are particularly troubled by the premature and politically-motivated decision to cancel the effective Migrant Protection Protocols with Mexico, as well as the Asylum Cooperation Agreements (ACAs) with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras – a serious and preventable foreign policy blunder that is exacerbating the crisis. This and other policy decisions have resulted in border encounters with U.S. authorities increasing from 17,106 last April to over 100,000 in February 2021. Most concerning is the increasing number of unaccompanied minors reaching the U.S. border, which was at a daily average of 332 in February, up 60% from the month President Biden took office.

The Biden Administration was warned by DHS's Customs and Border Protection about the consequences of dismantling President Trump's border policies. We believe that an objective evaluation by the Administration would have concluded that the asylum agreements were stemming illegal migration flows and deterring individuals from making the dangerous journey to the United States. Instead, as Mexico's President López Obrador has recently noted, the Administration ignored the risks and, by canceling Trump's policies, created the perception among migrants wanting to cross the border that it is now easier to do so.

In recent days, even Democrat Members of Congress have voiced their frustration and sounded the alarm over the foreseeable result of the Administration's reckless decisions – a surge of

migrants arriving at our border. For example, Rep. Vicente Gonzalez (D - TX) stated that “When you create a system that incentivizes people to come across, and they are released, that immediately sends a message to Central America that if you come across, you can stay... It incentivizes droves of people to come, and the only way to slow it down is by changing policy at the doorstep.” This bipartisan concern is being ignored by DHS Secretary Mayorkas, who has repeatedly obfuscated the Administration’s real message, telling migrants: “We are not saying, ‘Don’t come.’ We are saying, ‘Don’t come now’”

The Trump Administration’s agreements set up critical support for the region’s asylum systems and were built on the just concept of burden-sharing, which our partners appreciated and welcomed. We strongly urge you and Secretary Mayorkas to reimplement the agreements as soon as possible.

In addition, while we recognize the importance of foreign assistance in addressing the drivers of illegal migration, we also fear that the Biden Administration’s \$4 billion strategy emphasizes dollar amounts over the quality and effectiveness of U.S. foreign assistance. The Administration cannot address root causes in Central America and Mexico merely by throwing more money at the problem. We must regularly weigh whether existing programs are making a positive, measurable difference and achieving core objectives.

On a related note, last year Congress passed **P.L. 116-260** the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 that included the *United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act*, which Lead Republican McCaul introduced with former Chairman Engel. That law requires that you, in coordination with USAID, submit to Congress a five-year strategy to address the drivers of illegal migration that advances economic prosperity, combats corruption, strengthens democratic governance, and improves citizen security in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This strategy is also required to include benchmarks that can be evaluated on an annual basis. It is due in June of this year, but we encourage you to submit this vital strategy as soon as possible due to the current border crisis.

Based on that law and our comments above, we request clarity regarding the following:

1. Will you be able to submit the strategy required by the *United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act* by April 15 so that Congress and the Administration may work together to address the border crisis as soon as possible?
2. Typically, migration to the United States from Central America increases throughout the spring and reaches its annual high during the summer months. Assuming this trend continues, what are the current estimated numbers for arrivals during June, July, and August 2021, and what is the Administration doing to prepare for the expected increase?
3. What steps is the Administration taking to deter migrants from coming to the U.S.?
4. What was the reaction of the governments of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador when you canceled agreements they freely entered into and supported?

5. Has the Administration considered working with the government of Mexico in setting up facilities to house asylum applicants in central or southern Mexico in order to reduce the surge at the U.S. southern border and reduce the potential for violence, human trafficking, and transmission of COVID-19? If so, how far along are these discussions?
6. To what extent will Special Envoy Ricardo Zuniga be involved in creating the strategy required by the *United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act*? What conversations has Zuniga had thus far with Northern Triangle nations regarding asylum cooperation?
7. Has the Department of Homeland Security, or any other federal agency, requested C-175 authority to negotiate international agreements regarding various aspects of border policy, including but not limited to asylum cooperation?
8. The State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) delivers funding to entities like the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR). To what extent will that funding change in light of the decision to cancel our asylum capacity agreements (ACAs) with Northern Triangle countries? Since the Biden Administration has decided to cancel the ACAs, on what alternative basis will it continue to fund IOM and UNHCR efforts in the Mexico and the Northern Triangle?
9. In light of the ongoing violence in Mexico and the Northern Triangle that is partially responsible for driving out-migration, how will rule of law assistance funding administered by the Bureau of International Law Enforcement and Narcotics (INL) change to ensure that the region's police, judicial, and corrections institutions are strengthened to address recurring problems?

Sincerely,



MICHAEL T. McCAUL
Ranking Member
House Foreign Affairs Committee



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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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AUGUST PFLUGER
Member of Congress



NICOLE MALLIOTAKIS
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Peter Meijer in black ink, with a small "M.C." mark below it.

PETER MEIJER
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Young Kim in blue ink.

YOUNG KIM
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Ronny L. Jackson in black ink.

RONNY L. JACKSON
Member of Congress