

Immigration and Human Trafficking

Several of our Iowa state representatives traveled to the Texas – Mexico border from June 12-14 to gain first-hand information on the challenges now facing our nation and state regarding the ongoing migrant crisis and human trafficking. Unfortunately, I was not able to go. This is a report from State Rep. Mark Thompson of Belmond on what they saw firsthand.

Their meetings were supported by the professional law enforcement and volunteer organizations who, with no fanfare, courageously defend our nation each day.

A briefing they received from Custom Officers was emblematic of their entire experience since it brought home the issue we face in Iowa and as a nation. They were shown a display of an ongoing investigation of a semi which was pulled over at the port of entry in Pharr, Texas. During the inspection, fentanyl, cocaine, heroin, and marijuana were found in large quantities. Coincidentally, the truck's bill of lading indicated its destination was a city in Iowa.

Illicit drugs are pouring into our nation with, or separate from, the invasion of migrants. Thus far in 2023, 418,000,000 doses of fentanyl have been confiscated, again those numbers do not include what was not seized. Narcotics smugglers often push many migrants across the border in one location as a distraction, as drugs are brought across elsewhere.

Two words are frequently used in the context of our current migrant crisis: *invasion* and *humanitarian*.

When one asserts we are being invaded, it is not meant as hyperbole. **Invasion** is defined as “*an occasion when a large number of people or things come to a place in an annoying and unwanted way.*” Our current border policy has created a literal invasion that facilitates human trafficking. Young people who are destined for either labor or sex trafficking are intentionally woven into the masses that are invading our nation every day.

Exact numbers are elusive. However, we do know that just prior to Title 42 ending in May 2023, 10,000 people each day were caught crossing our

southern border. That's just the ones who were caught. Most reports indicate that number is lower now, but still in the thousands each day. Border Patrol estimates that for every person apprehended, 2-3 avoid temporary detention. In April alone, 16 people from our national terrorist watch list were caught. Best conservative estimates are 3000 people are **caught** each day.

The numbers are misleading because whether caught or not, such people are treated very much the same – ultimately released on their own recognizance for years. They are not held to account, and their locations and true intent are unknown.

The United States Government, at the federal level, is not incompetent - it is complicit in this crime. Regardless of the motive, the numbers of people coming across our border could not happen without the cooperation of those responsible for the sovereignty of our nation. They are failing by design. To be clear, these are the officials who make policy and choose to ignore existing laws, not those intrepid guardians working on the front lines each day.

The cartels control, as well as tax, every person and item which crosses into the United States from Mexico. Thousands of dollars are charged those who travel through Mexico and cross the border either legally or illegally each day. The amount is often based on ethnicity (Chinese are charged more than Guatemalans). The Mexican government does not control its own border with the U.S, but criminals inside the country are making billions of dollars per year.

The same U.S. officials who violate our own sovereignty use the term **humanitarian** as an excuse for their insipid and destructive policy. Based on numbers presented in sworn testimony before Congress, over 345,000 minors have entered the United States since 2021. **At a minimum, 85,000 children who have passed through our border checkpoints during that same period cannot be found. This alone is a crisis of epic proportions.**

Yet, nongovernmental organizations are provided \$1500.00 per day per migrant for upwards to three days by the federal government to provide shelter, transportation, and clothes. The transportation they provide is predicated on an alleged guardian or parent accompanying the children. Seldom are those children traveling with a true family member or a legal guardian, which leaves these children vulnerable to human trafficking.

Prior to 2021, DNA tests were conducted to verify familial connection and proved there was no genetic connection 94% of the time. Since early 2021, those tests have been eliminated. Consequently, children are handed over to complete strangers. Moreover, children are often used by having them accompany adults across the border to gain “family status” then taken back south across the border to do it all over again, day after day.

The circumstances surrounding people crossing our border, legally or illegally, vary tremendously. People south of our border are lured north with promises of good jobs by enterprises seeking cheap labor, no matter the cost to the individual worker or community. However, if migrants happen to cross through an established port of entry, they are told they cannot work until they appear in immigration court. The earliest court date for people now crossing our border is in 2027. Consequently, those here legally or illegally are told not to work for at least four years. These people receive government benefits. However, the reality for these people is that they have a large debt to the cartels. Thus, the migrants are compelled to work at any job, no matter the wage. So-called employers recognize the desperation and exploit it by paying low wages. Migrants are not willing to complain for fear of losing a job. Both employer and employee benefit from their relationship being concealed. Employers use third party contractors in an attempt to shield their culpability in hiring undocumented migrants.

Iowa, among other states, is contributing to this crisis. Disreputable Iowa employers create a demand for these people, and thus a destination. The low, or often non-existent wages they receive cast them into perpetual servitude to either their employers, the cartels or both. Those who don't pay, risk their lives and the lives of their families at the hands of the cartels here in Iowa or in their country of origin. Sex trafficking can become an alternative source of income.

What has Iowa done? Iowa, as well as other states, has been and is cooperating with Texas Governor Abbott's border effort. 100 Iowa National Guard troops and 30 state law enforcement officers will be going to the border for 30 days mostly during this month. We have established and funded an Iowa Office to Combat Human Trafficking housed within the Department of Public Safety. Training has been developed to help citizens understand the dynamics of human trafficking and know the signs to look for in a potential human trafficking situation. A training program for hotels and motels has been developed and is now being used by them to train and certify their employees to identify possible human trafficking in their place of business. This past session we increased the penalties for human

trafficking crimes and established a human trafficking study committee to investigate and make recommendations for best rehabilitative services for minors involved in human trafficking and for best training and protocols for law enforcement regarding human trafficking. The committee is also tasked with estimating funding that would be needed to implement these activities.

What more can Iowa do? Most importantly we must stop being a destination for illegal migrants. Here are some measures to accomplish that:

- Hold employers (not third-party contractors) responsible in verifying immigration status prior to employment
- Require the use of existing platforms such as E-Verify, H2A visas or other similar verification procedures for non-U.S. Citizens.
- Encourage non-governmental organizations to shift their advocacy from the border to destination locations (Iowa) where local volunteers are struggling to help those who are left destitute in Iowa communities.
- Build a network comprised of investigators, prosecutors and victims' assistance teams focused on human trafficking.

We look forward to working collaboratively in support of all aspects of fighting human trafficking in Iowa.

Feel free to contact me with ideas, thoughts, and concerns. My phone is 319-987-3021 or you can email me at sandy.salmon@legis.iowa.gov . I want to hear what you are thinking and will listen to your input. Together we will work to make a difference for the future of Iowa. Thank you very much for the honor of representing you!

Sincerely,

Sandy