

HENRY CUELLAR, PH.D.
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

October 6, 2020

Acting Secretary Chad F. Wolf
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, DC 20528-0525

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

As the United States continues to combat the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, thousands of American small businesses are facing economic challenges presented by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) prohibition on "non-essential" cross-border travel. The six-month halt to DHS discretionary travel at Land Ports of Entry has left local communities, across both the southern and northern U.S. borders, struggling to maintain their livelihoods and way of life. We must find a balance between the health of the individual and the health of the local economy.

After hearing from my constituents, local community leaders, and other Border Representatives in Congress, I believe that the U.S. can safely reopen its Land Ports of Entry to "non-essential" travel, on a localized basis. If a community feels that they can safely open their economy to "non-essential" travelers, then they can engage DHS through this proposal. If a community wishes to continue to restrict "non-essential" travel through local border crossings, then they have the option for DHS to maintain its current restrictions at that location. This is an ideal approach because it will allow local communities to maintain control over their public health decisions.

Therefore, I am respectfully requesting that DHS establish and implement a community-based program to partially lift COVID-19 travel restrictions for "non-essential" travelers at international Land Ports of Entry. In doing so, I ask that you:

- (1) Consult with local community leaders and their medical personnel, along with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), to determine criteria necessary to partially lift COVID-19 travel restrictions within border community jurisdictions that accommodate international Land Ports of Entry; and
- (2) Partially lift COVID-19 related travel restrictions for "non-essential" travelers and safely resume all cross-border operations, at both the southern and northern U.S. borders, for those communities who meet the pre-determined criteria. This includes restoring "non-essential" traveler lanes and reinstating U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers to oversee traffic in those lanes. Border communities will subsequently enforce their own jurisdictional COVID-19 public health orders.

This means that “non-essential” travelers will be screened twice when entering the U.S: first, through medical screenings by CBP officers, pursuant to federal protocols; and second, through community health screenings by local personnel.

I have discussed the plan, as outlined above, with CBP Commissioner Mark Morgan. I want to extend my sincere gratitude to him, and your entire Department, for continuing to work with me to solve this ongoing issue. Today, I also met with Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Marcelo Ebrard, who was receptive to this proposal. I felt encouraged by our conversation and I urge you speak with him, as this is a bilateral issue which our countries can best solve through coordinated efforts.

Thank you for considering this request and remaining attentive to the needs of my constituents. If you have any questions, please contact my Legislative Director, Travis Knight, at (202) 225-1640 or Travis.Knight@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henry Cuellar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "H" and a long, sweeping underline.

Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress
28th District of Texas