

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 28, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

We write to express our serious concern about the unprecedented surge in encounters along our country's northern border. This recent influx, along with spikes in drug smuggling and lack of U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) agent staffing, is yet another troubling example of your failure to protect and secure the homeland.

Over the last two years, southern border states have been overwhelmed with record illegal immigration, drug smuggling, and crime that has continuously poured into the local communities. This administration has watched idly as our states bear the brunt of disastrous and dangerous policies. Now, your refusal to address these crises has left America's northern border communities, from Alaska to Maine, along the world's longest international border, at the forefront of a growing threat to our national security.

According to Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data, in fiscal year 2022, USBP agents had 2,238 encounters at the northern border.¹ Now, in just the first four months of FY23, encounters have skyrocketed to 2,227 and nearly surpassed the total of last year's encounters.² Agents continue to put themselves in harm's way to keep our communities safe, and this 475% increase in encounters from the first four months of FY22 is both unsustainable and symptomatic of your broader failure to secure the border. As temperatures reach sub-zero levels and USBP agents conduct life-saving search and rescue missions, you continue to insist you are managing the border in a safe, orderly, and humane manner. However, our northern border is on track to see more than 10,000 encounters in FY23, while your department continues to downplay the threat posed by a wide-open northern border.

Specifically, the Swanton sector apprehended more undocumented immigrants in the previous four months than the last two fiscal years combined.³ In December 2022, a record 441 migrants from 19 different countries were apprehended attempting to cross into the U.S. through this sector.⁴ Further west, tragic stories, like an Indian family of four freezing to death as they attempted to traverse into North Dakota, highlight the dangers your leadership has created for migrants and the brave men and women of USBP.⁵

¹ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/vermont-border-apprehensions-last-months-more-past-two-years-combined>

⁴ <https://nypost.com/2023/01/29/illegal-crossings-at-canadian-border-surge-during-migrant-crisis/>

⁵ Ibid.

In addition to increases in illegal immigration, the northern border has seen a spike in drug smuggling. Excluding marijuana, drug smuggling seizure weight increased by 596% along the northern border from FY21 to FY22.⁶ More specifically, khat increased 1,756%, ecstasy increased 1,736%, ketamine increased 663%, and methamphetamine increased 204%.⁷ Even more concerning, CBP seized 14 pounds of fentanyl in FY22 along the northern border⁸; enough to kill an estimated 3.17 million people.⁹ The damage this lethal drug can do to a community has been well-documented over the years, notably across New England states.¹⁰ We cannot allow another avenue for fentanyl smuggling into our communities that are already inundated by the drug crisis down south.

As record levels of border encounters and drug smuggling continue to rise, USBP staffing on the northern border has remained relatively static.¹¹ In between the 138 ports of entry in our northern states, only 2,019 USBP agents have been assigned to protect and monitor the 5,525 border miles. Officials from the northern Border Patrol sectors tell us they have also assumed additional work to support southern border agents – explicitly, digitally processing illegal migrants who have been apprehended at the southern border.

Finally, in a 2019 analysis, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) stated your agency does not even have performance measures to assess security along the northern border.¹² GAO concluded, “While CBP has performance measures...some of which include data from the Northern border, it does not have specific measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the Northern border between ports of entry.”

These surges in border encounters and drug smuggling coupled with a shortage of Border Patrol agents and lack of security measures place America’s northern border at serious risk. As winter turns to spring, we are deeply concerned the northern Border Patrol agents will be even more overwhelmed, under-resourced, and under-manned. We ask that you provide a full account of what the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will do to mitigate the flow of illegal migrants and illicit drugs into the U.S. across our northern border.

Sincerely,

⁶ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>

⁷ Ibid.

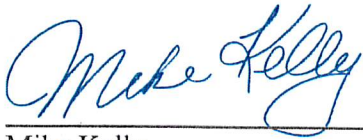
⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://www.dea.gov/resources/facts-about-fentanyl>

¹⁰ https://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/54654/NERJOI-Action-Researcher-Report-Sept-2020-Final.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2021-Aug/U.S.%20Border%20Patrol%20Fiscal%20Year%20Staffing%20Statistics%20%28FY%201992%20-%20FY%202020%29%20%28508%29.pdf>

¹² <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-470>



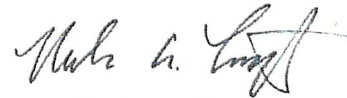
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Member of Congress



Ryan K. Zinke
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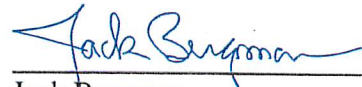
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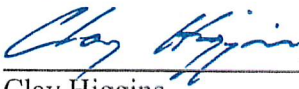
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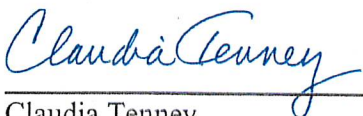
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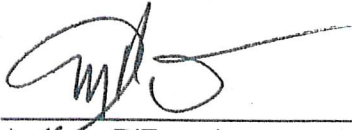
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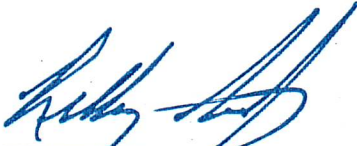
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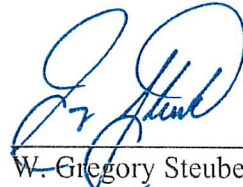
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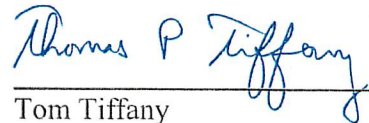
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