Rethinking the Texas Border

Karen Smith February 19, 2010

The Problem: The Texas/Mexico border is usually described by politicians with agendas as a chaotic warzone, where drug lords are in charge. Illegal Mexican immigrants are blamed for American job losses, but such blame games overshadow the complexities of the real situation.

Since 2005, Governor Perry and other officials (such as Mayor Bill White) have promoted spending hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to increase police efforts at the border - allowing local police to detain undocumented workers for deportation. Obsessively checking immigration status diverts attention from the real violent criminals. Racial profiling of Hispanics has also dramatically increased during routine traffic stops and in Hispanic communities where legitimate Hispanic immigrants have simply overstayed their visas.

Governor Perry has also argued for a “wall” being built along the Texas border. This wall would be a serious detriment to the environment, the economy, and efficient transit across the border. The Bush Administration's Homeland Security officials admitted that the wall would add at least 5 minutes to the normal travel time into and out of Mexico. All of these are temporary and ineffective solutions at best.

The Solution:

The current administration fails to mention that Mexico represents the second largest export market for the US and the third largest import market. Undocumented workers, contributing more via increased production and sales taxes paid than they utilize, prove themselves a net asset. Furthermore, the mythic drug war going on in Mexico is conducted by organized gangs operating in Mexico. Trying to fight the drug war by targeting undocumented workers in the US is simply misdirected. We should be promoting policies that grant legal status to undocumented workers that provide information leading to the arrest of gang members.

Farouk Shami proposes increasing border trade by building high skill operations on this side of the border and low skill, affordable labor across the border. He advocates improving the third world conditions of shack communities called Colinas - in which half a million Texans languish - with basics like clean water, roads, and doctors. Such increased infrastructure would also support new manufacturing plants. Increasing higher education funding in the Valley would also support the increase of highly skilled workers.

We must stop thinking of the border as a warzone and start thinking of it as an underdeveloped asset. With bold leadership like Frank Shoumi, it could become one of the most prosperous manufacturing areas in the country.