



COVID-19 Bulletin

July 3, 2020

“America is Facing 5 Epic Crises All at Once”. The heading and article by David Brooks in the New York Times on June 25 stunned me (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/25/opinion/us-coronavirus-protests.html>). His description of the topsy-turvy environment we have is an attempt at making sense of it all, but I think it’s too much of a doomsday scenario. Most people don’t feel at ease with the uncertainty brought by changing rules and procedures, devaluations, viruses, earthquakes, and the like, but I believe that many binational stakeholders are especially adept at adapting to changing circumstances and developments beyond our control. There is a resilience, persistence and creativity at the border that we don’t see elsewhere.

It has always struck me that our border community has not made a greater effort to have a real conversation with the **White House**. So I spoke with **Reince Priebus**, former White House Chief of Staff and former chair of the Republican National Committee about the border. Reince is more familiar with the border than I expected. My objective is simple: open a communication channel with the White House.

Rafael Fernandez de Castro, Director of the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at UCSD, has kicked off “**Emerging Stronger After COVID-19: CaliBaja Working Group**”. We are several border people who discuss the lessons we’ve learned

from the pandemic, what we missed, what we did right, and how we can come out of this with a fresh perspective.

Last Monday the 29th I presented “Ports of Entry and Infrastructure for People and Cargo”. In all, seven key themes will be discussed over the next three months. In the end, we will have a document with public policy recommendations.

Richard Kiy is the new director at the **Institute of the Americas (IA)**. He is a friend, someone who spent 14 years at the helm of the International Community Foundation and was most recently managing partner of Alumbra Advisors, a consulting firm. He has also had important business development roles at PriceSmart and SAIC. I cannot think of anyone better qualified to lead the Institute. Congrats to **Ted Gildred III** and the IA board for making this happen!

RedXTijuana (<https://tijuainnovadora.com/redxtijuana>) continues to push the envelope, bringing donors from the U.S. and Mexico to listen to potential grantees in Tijuana. Jose Galicot and Laura Araujo have enlisted collaboration from International Community Foundation, Fundación Internacional de la Comunidad and others for this effort. Tijuana Innovadora never ceases to amaze me with their persistence and action-oriented team.

Borders Committee / COBRO held an important joint videoconference where significant border topics came up: the border master plan effort for which Caltrans is making an unprecedented effort for non-government stakeholder input; 2019 crossing stats showing a significant decrease in vehicle crossings, a very important increase in pedestrian crossings and a continuing increase in trade dollars even though fewer trucks crossed the border. Please see https://sandag.org/uploads/meetingid/meetingid_5338_27619.pdf for more information.

In the same videoconference Jason Wells of the San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce addressed the need for basic infrastructure for border crossers such as widening sidewalks along East San Ysidro Blvd. and lifting border restrictions to non-essential travel, citing that they have severely impacted San Ysidro's yearly \$600 million in sales. Let's not forget that 94% of all store revenue in east San Ysidro and 65% of sales in west San Ysidro depend on Tijuana buyers.

Health and safety local police checkpoints in Mexicali to ensure adherence to stay at home orders created 7-hour lines in Calexico. Though temperature checks, verification of face mask use and essential trips are critical, there was little coordination with the Calexico public administration or CBP. It also shows that both Mexicali SAT and INAMI need more federal support to do this important work themselves.

The Mexican section of the Border Health Commission has been picking up the slack left by its U.S. counterpart. The section works with the Mexican Consulate for health information, does health assessments, goes to migrant camps, does public policy advocacy and health and education campaigns, among others. More funding for the U.S. sector will allow local health issues to be managed locally instead of Washington, D.C.

Ramon Riesgo, GSA southern port project director, reminded me of the **Border Liaison Mechanism** and its effect on cross-border infrastructure prioritization. The mechanism was typically convened by consuls general of both countries between 1993 and 2013 and brought together local, state and federal officials, departments of transportation and customs agencies. It was a closed door environment with clear objectives. It avoided politics and personal agendas and made sure federal governments did not overlook local needs. It's time to revisit it.

Architect Jorge Gutierrez, a mobility expert and well-known civic mover and shaker in Tijuana, spoke to me about the concept of “occupational mobility” and how, given more predictable flows in all lanes at our border, the idea of the “transborder commuter” would come to life. He states that San Diego and Tijuana are misaligned when it comes to planning, time frames and regular interaction in the mobility space.

The Tijuana Local Development Council (CDT), as many other civic and business associations in Baja California, is discussing whether it should enhance its funding model. The COVID-19 response has required much more government spending than usual for basic services, crowding out money normally earmarked for council projects. With the 2034 strategic plan as part of its work, the CDT should position itself to pitch its projects to foundations, NADBANK, family offices and crowdsourcing options in Mexico and in other parts of the globe.

8 New Lanes at San Ysidro: Mexico finally started demolition of the old Puerta de Mexico area and construction of eight new northbound lanes that will connect to the new lanes available at the modernized San Ysidro Port of Entry. This is a 4-5 month project and represents a \$2 million investment.

Otay Mesa East: Mexico’s Communications and Transportation Ministry (SCT) gave its go ahead for the right of way purchases in June. The bid to choose the company that will be coordinating the acquisitions went out on July 2nd.

Our Coalition was asked to speak about the future of border crossings at the virtual **Agro Baja** (<http://www.agrobaja.com/AGGG-4/PAGINA/>) / **4FRONTED** (<https://www.4fronted.org/>) event on July 1st. Most of the audience were binational stakeholders in the Yuma, San Luis, Calexico/Imperial Valley and Mexicali area, where agriculture is king.

It turns out that **two thirds of the people who work in the fields in the Imperial Valley come from Baja California or Sonora on H-2A visas or are**

green card holders living on the Mexican side of the border. When northbound lines are long, when people do not want to work because of a fear of getting infected or when the CARES Act and traditional state benefits add up to about \$980 per week --more than most agricultural workers make on average—crops are lost and prices skyrocket. This is what happened with the latest melon crop in the Valley.

USMCA launch: the new trade agreement is off to the races. Most people trumpet this as a “great thing” though there were two less sanguine opinions on The Wilson Center’s website that cannot be ignored. One was from **Luis Rubio**, Global Fellow and Advisory Board member, who stated that “the primary objective of NAFTA was strategic and political. USMCA is above all a compromise on trade,” and “there is no way that the new USMCA will provide for long-term economic growth and political certainty because it is not meant to accomplish that.”

The other opinion is from **Duncan Wood, Director of the Mexico Institute.** He writes of a “need to push our three countries' leaders to think beyond trade. There needs to be an investment of time, effort, and political capital in addressing issues as diverse as energy integration, climate change, citizen security, organized crime and drugs, and ensuring that the region as a whole is prepared to face exogenous and endogenous threats.” Please see <https://bit.ly/2BZrNyg>

The **Wilson Center** has come out with a sensational short video on USMCA: <https://bit.ly/2C6iECV>

Kudos to **Alejandra Mier Y Teran** and her team at the **Otay Mesa Chamber** for pulling off **Mexport** on a virtual platform. It was a novel way for exhibitors like Smart Border Coalition to connect with the trade community. In all, the experience was very positive. We are all learning how to manage relationships using platforms that were not available even one year ago. Our coalition used

the event in part to showcase our new welcome video, which you can see here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRuQTMSaO6U>.

CBX launched the “Warm Hearts, Warm Meals” campaign. The company has pledged to match every donation made, up to \$25,000 dollars. It is inviting its passengers, guests, and community to join these efforts and support the International Community Foundation’s mission “Meaningful Giving, Inspired Change.” For updates and more information please visit www.crossborderexpress.com or follow this link to donate now at <https://bit.ly/2YrGDp2>.

El Trompo Interactive Museum needs your help. The museum co-founded by **Jorge Kuri Rojo**, Smart Border Coalition member, closed its doors since March 17 and has gone from 70 to 15 employees with absolutely no income since then. Director Rosario Ruiz Camacho made an impassioned plea to Tijuana and San Diego communities to donate. El Trompo launched the “Girando por el Trompo” (“Spinning for el Trompo”) campaign at <https://www.eltrompo.org/donativos> or Banorte account number 0823260762 or CLABE 072 028 00823 2607623.

With best wishes,

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