

July 17, 2017

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich
303 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Thank You for Reclaiming the Narrative about Border Communities

Dear Senator Heinrich,

On behalf of the ACLU of New Mexico Regional Center for Border Rights, Comunidades en Accion y de Fe, NM Wildlife Federation, and Southwest Environmental Center, we write to thank you for the remarks you delivered at the May 1st congressional press conference commemorating immigrant rights day.

As you highlighted in your remarks, southwest border communities are among the safest, most diverse, and ecologically unique communities in the nation. For generations, the unique histories, cultures, and experiences of people native to this region and immigrants from across the world have made our borderlands a beautiful place to call home and visit.

While our nation hasn't always lived up to its promises to protect the civil and human rights of everyone who calls these communities home, regardless of where they were born, the color of their skin, or their religious beliefs, our communities have lived with a peaceful conviction to respect one another and work together.

That's why we find President Trump's proposals to expand walls, discriminatory policing, and the disproportionate incarceration of people of color so offensive to our values of equity and justice. Our communities have already suffered the scar of over 652 miles of vehicle and pedestrian fencing, the privacy invasions of surveillance technologies developed for theaters of war, and the dignity robbing practices of Border Patrol agents who too often rely on racial profiling or using excessive force.

Previous hiring surges of border agents without adequate investment in meaningful oversight, transparency and accountability has driven a wedge between our communities and those agents who take to heart their oath to respect the U.S. Constitution. Construction of existing walls has directly contributed to migrant deaths, impeded farmers and ranchers on their property and severed First Nations from their sacred, ancestral lands. Walls have also caused devastating floods and soil erosion and threatened critical habitats for endangered species like ocelots, Mexican wolves and jaguars.

As you said on May 1st, we are better than this. Americans are far more pragmatic and humane than this. Three-quarters of Americans support legalization over deportation. Americans who protested at airports following President Trump's Muslim ban understood that our nation is defined by how it treats people seeking our help and fleeing violence, and that true freedom can only be realized when we unite to protect human rights rather than divide communities based on fear and discrimination.

We thank you for speaking boldly on the need for core American values of fairness and justice to define our immigration laws and how they are enforced in border communities. We ask that you continue to seek opportunities to highlight the economic, cultural and ecological treasures that border communities offer to the nation. And we urge you to ensure New Mexico and we, as border stakeholders, have seats at the table when policy and budgetary decisions are made that impact our health, safety, rights and environments.

Sincerely,



Victoria B. Gaubeca, Director
ACLU Regional Center for Border Rights



Sarah Silva, Executive Director
NM Comunidades en Accion y de Fe



Gabe Vasquez, S. NM Outreach Coordinator
NM Wildlife Federation



Kevin Bixby, Executive Director
Southwest Environmental Center