



➤ BORDER LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

The XXXII Border Legislative Conference (BLC) convened September 20-21, 2019 in Mexico City, Mexico where thirty-four lawmakers from the U.S. and Mexico border region participated in round table discussions and learned from policy experts on important cross-border concerns. These topics include ports of entry and wait times, public safety, early childhood learning, the state – federal relationship, migration, emergency preparedness, and cross-border trade.

Legislators from the U.S. – Mexico border states of Arizona, California, Coahuila, Chihuahua, New Mexico, Nuevo Leon, Sonora, and Texas participated in the conference, as well as from the State of Colorado. Also in attendance were legislative staff and representatives of this year’s program sponsors – CNA, International Paper, R.L. Jones, and Sempra.

Diputado Marco Antonio Gonzalez Valdez (Nuevo Leon), BLC Chair, welcomed the members to the two-day conference on the morning of September 20 and facilitated the meeting in its entirety. Opening with action items, BLC members first approved the 2019 BLC leadership by confirming Diputado Marco Antonio Gonzalez to the position of chair as he had been interim chair for most of the year. Next, members unanimously approved the recommendation by CSG West staff to modify the process of selecting BLC officers to a rotating basis among the 10 U.S. – Mexico border states. Based on the recommendations therein, including the sequence of states in the coming years, the members elected California Assemblymember Jose Medina as the BLC vice chair, to rotate to the position of chair in 2020.

The conference’s first panel focused on *Ports of Entry and Wait Times* along the U.S. - Mexico border, which is the most frequently crossed in the world. During this policy discussion, members heard from Victor de Leon, Branch Chief of Intergovernmental Affairs and Pete Flores, Director of Field Operations in San Diego, both from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and Luis Ramirez, President of Ramirez Advisors Inter-





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National. Mr. Ramirez provided an overview of port of entry operations in the Arizona – Sonora region. This included the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s (FMCSA) proposal to build new commercial truck inspection facilities near the Nogales - Mariposa and San Luis II land ports of entry, the modernization of State Route 189, and Arizona’s national impact from its port of entry system. Director Flores provided an overview of the California - Baja California ports of entry. He mentioned the 3,000 trucks entering Otay Mesa every day, the high percentage of narcotics seized at the border, and the modernization of ports like the Cross Border Xpress (CBX). Thereafter, members engaged in a robust discussion on infrastructure, trade, and security concluding that wait times result in the loss of money for businesses and travelers, and that the safer people feel crossing the border the more usage there is along the ports of entry. In addition to the economic impacts of wait times there is also a human impact, such as parents not being able to pick up their children from school. While there are numerous challenges ranging from six-hour wait times to non-paved roads leading to the ports of entry, the panelists recommended a multi-agency approach to enhance port operations. This includes the state and federal governments of both countries, along with the private sector, working collaboratively to plan, design, budget, and ensure proper and safe utilization of a port of entry.

Dr. Raul Benitez-Manaut of the National Autonomous University of Mexico and Dr. Bruce Bragley from the University of Miami facilitated a policy discussion on *Public Safety along the U.S. and Mexico Border* with a spotlight on organized crime. They provided a history of narcotics, government interventions such as Plan Colombia and the Merida Initiative, and the dismantling of notorious and centralized drug cartels that lead to the fragmentation of drug trafficking organizations in Mexico. Dr. Benitez-Manaut illustrated the top-ten states where homicide rates have increased in 2019 which include the three U.S. and Mexico border states of Baja California, Chihuahua, and Sonora. During their concluding remarks, both panelists expressed that organized crime is a





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hemispheric problem, and more specifically, a public safety issue in Mexico and a public health issue in the United States.

For the first time, BLC members addressed the topic of *Early Childhood Learning*, hearing from topic experts and engaging in a substantive policy discussion. During this session, BLC members heard from Aressa Coley, Project Director from West Ed, Ricardo Antonio Bucio Mujica, Executive Secretary at Mexico's National System of Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents (SIPINNA), Jose Luis Gutierrez Espindola, Advisor to the Undersecretary of Basic Education from Mexico's Secretary of Education, and Gladys Barrios, Director of Early Childhood Education at the National Council for Educational Development (CONAFE) on the challenges and opportunities in supporting quality and accessible early childhood education. In the U.S., psychologists, economists, and policy analysts continue to find long-term benefits to early childhood education. In Mexico, the federal government recently changed its Constitution to include early childhood education nationwide.

The last issue addressed on the first day of the conference was a conversation among the BLC members on the *State & Federal Relationship* that was facilitated by Chris Wilson, Deputy Director of the Mexico Institute at the Wilson Center. As part of this conversation, BLC members engaged in an open dialogue regarding the Colorado River Compact, including current challenges in providing water deliveries to Mexico, migration patterns, social media as a modern tool allowing members voices heard, discrimination, and ways to effectively collaborate with other states and the federal congress of both countries.

Day two of the conference started with a policy discussion on *Migration*. The panelists included Muzaffar Chishti, Director of the Migration Policy Institute's Office at New York University School of Law, and Andres Rozental, Eminent Ambassador of Mexico and President of Rozental & Associates. With migration at the forefront of policy discussions





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in both the U.S. and Mexico, this session addressed three questions: why immigration has become such a high-profile issue in U.S. policy and politics; how migration is affecting the U.S. state and federal relationship; and details of Mexico's current immigration agenda. Additionally, it touched on the indirect costs of migration, such as Mexico's National Guard being deployed to Mexico's southern border, the U.S. and Mexico's image of deporting immigrants from south and central America, and the future relationship of the two countries.

From earthquakes to active shooters, Tania Ramirez, Director of Sectoral Consultation of Mexico's National Coordination of Civil Protection and Mark Chilarducci, Director of the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), joined the BLC members for a discussion on *Emergency Preparedness*. The overarching message of the speakers was that disasters know no borders, and to methodically prepare for surprises due to their unpredictability. The panelists concluded by recommending that proper training, binational collaboration, and a better understanding of the risks and threats of climate change are crucial now more than ever.

Lastly, Chris Wilson, Deputy Director of the Mexico Institute at the Wilson Center, Erik Lee; Executive Director of the North American Research Partnership; and Monica Lugo, Director of Innovation and Competitiveness, and Roman Fernandez, Director of Border Affairs, both with Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led a discussion on *Trade and the U.S.- Mexico –Canada Agreement (USMCA)*. The panelists shared a macro level overview, both from an Arizona – Mexico and a broader binational perspective, emphasizing the significant trading relationship between the two countries.

The members concluded the conference by expressing topics of interest for the next meeting, including the possibility of an interim, regional meeting in the State of Nuevo Leon. Diputado Marco Antonio Gonzalez Valdez was recognized for his leadership of the meeting and received an award on behalf of the entire membership.





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The XXXIII BLC will convene next year in the State of California and will be hosted by California Assemblymember Jose Medina, the 2020 BLC chair. Details of dates and location will be provided once confirmed.



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