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House of Representatives

BUSH SHOULD DECLARE STATE OF EMERGENCY AT MEXICO BORDER

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OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to make sure all of my colleagues understand the economic crisis that is occurring at the U.S.-Mexico border from San Diego, California, which I represent, all the way east of Brownsville, Texas. These border communities are in an economic crisis and need immediate help.

After September 11 this country took all sorts of security measures designed to prevent terrorist acts again. All those measures were extremely necessary, important and supported by this body and by the American people. Yet some of those measures that we took had economic consequences which we did not foresee and which have to be taken care of in the months following September 11. For example, we grounded all general aviation. Many businesses went out of business in that sector of the economy. Now they are trying to get back on their feet.

The border communities had been neglected in looking at the aftermath of September 11. We heightened security at the southern border, appropriately so. We started what is called a level one alert, to make sure no further terrorists could get into our country. That level one alert required much more search of cars, much more questioning of individuals, checking of IDs, all of which the American people support; but we did not add increased resources at the southern border to handle this increased level of security.

So the waits at the border for legal crossers, those who are doing business, those who are going to school, those that live in this country and are U.S. citizens, perhaps, but live for whatever reason in Mexico, people who shop, people who work legally, the wait at the borders have been at least several hours, up to 4, sometimes up to 7 or 8 hours. The border wait can be 2 hours one day, 8 hours next day, an hour the next day.

It is the uncertainty that prevents people who legally want to cross our southern borders, work here, shop here, they are prevented from doing so. In fact, in the biggest border crossing in the world, which is in my congressional district in San Ysidro, California, businesses have dropped

anywhere from 50 to 90 percent. Many have gone out of business. Others are facing bankruptcy.

If you go across the border to Calexico, California, or Nogales, Arizona, or El Paso, Texas, or Laredo or Brownsville, the situation is the same. The dropping of business is anywhere from 50 to 90 percent. These are small businesses. They cannot sustain this level of activity before they go out of business.

We can cure this, Mr. Speaker. We can cure this with more resources. I have asked the Governor of California, my colleagues have asked their Governors, we asked the President of the United States to declare an economic state of emergency along the border so we can get in low-interest loans and economic help for these small businesses; but more important, we need to keep the lanes of traffic flowing and open.

The district director in San Diego told me that if she had 20 more positions per shift, or a hundred more new positions, she could keep all 24 lanes of San Ysidro open 24 hours a day. What would that require? It would require \$6 million, Mr. Speaker, \$6 million. If that is multiplied out across the border, we mean maybe 20 to \$25 million to make sure we kept the level one security and we keep that flow of legal traffic moving swiftly across the border.

We need to put that 20 to \$25 million in any supplemental bill that comes through this House, Mr. Speaker. We need to make sure that we can assure Americans that our borders are safe, that we do not put out of business all of the communities that live on that crossborder's legal trade.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask the Governors of the border States, and I ask the President of the United States to declare an economic state of emergency, and I ask this House to appropriate \$20 million to \$25 million for full staffing of the southern border checkpoints so that we can have both security and commerce.