

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# TIME TO MEDIATE THE IMMIGRATION CRISIS AT THE BORDER

As someone who calls San Diego home, I'm paying close attention to the immigration crisis. The crisis now has a face — hundreds of faces, really — attached to it. Last weekend, 500 unaccompanied migrant girls, ages 13-17, arrived in San Diego. For the next few months, they will call the convention center home. Most of the girls come from Mexico and the Central American countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. They were sent to San Diego from Border Patrol facilities in Texas and Arizona — a small fraction of the more than 9,300 minors apprehended by U.S. officials in February. The situation is expected to worsen. Documents leaked to reporter Stef Kight of Axios show that President Joe Biden's administration projects the number of unaccompanied minors crossing the border could spiral to as many as 26,000 in September. It's simple math: The Border Patrol takes more youth into custody than it releases, whether

to family members or to facilities run by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Yet the consequences are complex — and not contained to San Diego. Immigration is the most divisive issue our country has faced since slavery. We want to be compassionate. But we also worry about economic effects, like lower wages and job losses for unskilled workers. And lately, there are health concerns as we begin to finally emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. For decades, we've had a schizophrenic relationship with Mexican immigrants, in particular. In the late 1800s, inspection stations were set up at ports of entry along the southern border to limit the number of migrants coming to the United States. These controls were eased during the first and second World Wars because of labor shortages — only to be followed by mass deportations, once the fighting was over. It's not just our need for workers that has guided whether we turn on or turn off the spigot. There are also political calcula-

tions. In the mid-1960s, President Lyndon Johnson signed a bill that ended numerical restrictions by country of origin. It aimed to promote American ideals and combat the rise of communism. When policies haven't worked, we've turned to physical deterrents such as border fencing and walls, perimeter lighting and high-tech surveillance equipment. We've added Border Patrol agents and stepped up their training. But frequent calls to penalize employers hiring undocumented workers have been largely ignored. If anything is consistent about the immigration crisis, it's our inability to resolve it. According to the Immigrant Learning Center, there are 44.7 million immigrants living in the United States today. Twenty-seven percent (11.8 million people) are unauthorized, more than half of whom came from Mexico. Now, the worrisome situation at the border has been compounded by an influx of people from northern Central America, fleeing crime, poverty, gang violence and climate disasters.

Recently, at his first news conference, Biden tried to dispute the idea that the border is overrun. He said, "The truth of the matter is, nothing has changed. It happens every single, solitary year: There is a significant increase in the number of people coming to the border in the winter months of January, February, March ... It's the time they can travel with the least likelihood of dying on the way because of the heat in the desert, number one." With respect, Mr. President, that sounds like a dodge. If the president would like the advice of an experienced mediator, I would offer this counsel: Bring together representatives from both sides of the border debate. Tell them the conflict is theirs to resolve, no matter how long it takes. Then encourage frank dialogue, with these ground rules: Speak in a non-threatening way and listen, respectfully, to the other side's point of view. Undoubtedly, passions will be ignited, whether a person is arguing on behalf of human rights or

the fiscal interests of American workers. But it's the only way to resolve differences. Here's another guidepost: Everyone at the table must be willing to collaborate and work toward mutually acceptable solutions. There is no "winner takes all." More than compromising, this means finding solutions that both sides consider to be a win-win — not a small task, but one that's made easier when they can see things through each other's eyes. Identifying common ground is table stakes in any successful mediation. And so, here's an idea to consider as we look to resolve the conflict at the border: Can we agree that the safety of children — regardless of their country of origin — is a noble and shared goal? Just that single agreement would be a very good start.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit [ncrconline.com](http://ncrconline.com)

## LIBRARIES

FROM B1 in the region read at an elementary school level or not at all. About 60 percent of low-income students in San Diego don't have books at home. "The reality is there are vast disparities," said Supervisor Nora Vargas, who represents cities and neighborhoods in southern parts of the county. "Many communities' children don't have access to age-appropriate books at home, which causes them to fall behind." Vargas brought the initiative to the board. She said it will address some disparities in disadvantaged communities by promoting and encouraging reading from home. The county plans to set aside \$20,000 for the ini-

tiative. The county's library system would work with the San Diego Council on Literacy and other nonprofits and volunteer groups to install more little libraries. The book-sharing boxes are a program of the Little Free Library, a national nonprofit that provides mini-library building materials and information to people all over the world. People can register the libraries with the organization for a one-time fee of \$40 to \$80. All little libraries don't have to register. There are dozens in San Diego that are not affiliated with it. The registration fee can be an obstacle for some, as well as getting the materials to build the libraries and purchasing books to fill them, advocates say. "I think a lot of folks, they forget how expensive books

are," said Jose Cruz, CEO of the San Diego Council on Literacy. "You go into a regular store, you're going to pay \$12 to \$15 for a book. ... For a low-income family, that's a lot." In an effort to help families interested in operating little libraries, Cruz said the council will collect donated books for the libraries. He said Little Libraries can increase children's access to books in a "neighborly" way. "Here are these residents in all these communities across America and beyond that are building their own libraries and exchanging books, reading them, trading them, and it's just something that makes you feel good," Cruz said. It's unclear how many little libraries are located in San Diego's southern neigh-



Kristian Carreon  
**Katia Padilla and her daughter Fernanda stock their library with books in multiple languages.**

borhoods because many are not officially registered. Padilla said there are at least 10 little libraries within a 3-mile radius of her home. Neighbors in Logan

Heights and Valencia Park have been installing little libraries across those neighborhoods. A community council in Valencia Park has already helped install four

little libraries. Padilla opened the little library in front of her home two years ago and has seen how successful they are. "Putting them in areas of low-income, that's going to make so many kids happy," she said. "I wish we have little free libraries on every block." She keeps the libraries stocked with books in Spanish, Tagalog and other languages. She also recently opened a little library outside her home in Baja California. "You see kids who are very low income and they ask you, 'Are you sure they are free?' and then you see their big smiles and sometimes they say, 'I've never had a book,'" Padilla said.

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## SMUGGLING

FROM B1 and dies," Bencivengo said, according to a news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of California. "But it is more tragic that there are people who benefit from this, who treat them like cargo." Court documents in the case outline how both sets of siblings were searching for better lives for their large, poor families in their rural hometowns, but were not well-prepared for the multi-day trek through rain and snow. The court papers also document how an elite Border Patrol search-and-rescue team also struggled with grueling elements in a race against time to try to save the last surviving sister. Defense attorney Kenneth Troiano described the agents' rescue efforts as "no less than heroic." According to sentencing documents, the Santos Arce sisters frequently came to the United States for agricultural work, mostly picking strawberries in the Northwest. In early 2020, the sisters were again planning to find work in the U.S. and made their way to Tijuana, along with a nephew and Paula's 18-month-old daughter, where they agreed to pay smugglers \$8,500 per person to be led across the border.



COURTESY OF U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
**Border Patrol agents try to save Juana Santos Arce on Feb. 10, 2020.**

last month in a separate federal human smuggling case. Cecilio, Ricardo and the sisters set off Feb. 9 knowing it would be a multi-day journey crossing the border near Campo and continuing across a highway, an interstate and into the rugged mountain terrain to the "Shrine Trail." The group set off in the rain, and on the second day, after already trekking at least 16 miles into higher elevation, became caught in a snowstorm. Prosecutors said the group did not have proper clothing and supplies to survive the harsh weather, and they stopped near a large boulder, where "the sisters no longer could continue — each one slowly started dying due to the effects of hypothermia." Defense attorneys said the men huddled with the women, trying to keep them warm until the early afternoon of Feb. 10, when they hiked to a spot where they could get cell-phone reception to call 911. By that time, one of the sisters was dead, and a second sister died by the time Border Patrol agents reached the group about three hours later. A photo from the scene shows the agents working to try to save Juana on a steep, snow-covered hill — an area where the conditions and terrain made it too difficult for a helicopter to hoist her away. The agents next tried to carry Juana, but the path

was too steep and slippery. Instead, they began preparations to camp out overnight in an attempt to keep the eldest sister alive, but as night fell, the "agents realized they too were beginning to experience the effects of hypothermia and started calling for reinforcements," according to prosecutors. A San Diego Fire-Rescue Department helicopter was unable to hoist the injured woman, so a paramedic from the aircraft dropped onto the mountain to help care for her. Soon thereafter, she died. It wasn't until later that night, as Border Patrol agents studied the victims' Mexican voting cards, that authorities realized they were sisters. "The sad truth is that Mr. (Cecilio) Rios-Quinones will forever live with the guilt of having been part of a criminal act that killed three women," his attorney, Michelle Betancourt, wrote in a sentencing memo. "(He) regrets the tremendous loss his actions caused the Santos family." Ricardo Rios-Quinones wrote in a letter to the judge: "I am a man of faith and I am very remorseful for what I did ... We weren't prepared for the storm and I would have never participated in this if I would have known someone would end up hurt or dead. I feel terrible for what happened."

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## 79TH

FROM B1 to \$1 million dollars for a state assembly seat unless it's contested between parties. This big spending likely represents an effort to end an inter-party contest, he said. "This is a safely Democratic seat," Kousser said. "Raising big, and I'd imagine also spending big, is designed to earn a majority of votes right now. One of the reasons is fights within parties get ugly, and you don't want to have them drag out. Her supporters probably (want to) go in early, go in strong and finish the civil war quickly." Weber, a La Mesa councilwoman and obstetrician/gynecologist, tallied more than 250 individual donations ranging from \$100 to several hundred dollars. Those include a number of contributions from fellow physicians and other elected officials, including La Mesa Councilman Bill Baber, and Encinitas Mayor Catherine Blakespear, who recently declared her own candidacy for the state senate. Weber received larger donations, up to the maximum individual level of \$4,900, from fellow Democrats Assemblywoman Buffy Wicks, D-Oakland, Assemblyman Chris Holden, D-Pasadena, and State Sen. Nancy Skinner, D-Berkeley. She also drew top contributions from the California African American PAC, Women in Power PAC, the California Nurses Association PAC, the Union of American Physicians and Dentists Small Contributor Committee. Political action committees operate independently of the candidate and under different financial contribution rules. A PAC described as "Weber for Assembly 2021, sponsored by health care, business and domestic worker organizations; frontline health care and essential workers" brought in a \$200,000 check from the California Medical Association, \$100,000 each from the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America IEC and the California Dental Association Independent Expenditure PAC, \$50,000 from the United Domestic Workers of America and contributions from several others. Those funds went primarily to television ad buys in support of Weber, along with digital ads, polling and other campaign services, according to campaign filings. Weber's own campaign spent nearly \$267,000 as of March 20 on a variety of vot-

er outreach methods. "Thanks to my friends, family, and our district-wide network of supporters we have spent thousands of hours talking to voters over the phone and by text message," Weber said in an e-mail. "We have also sent a number of pieces of direct mail, and we've run an aggressive digital ad program. We are doing everything we can to remind voters about this important special election." Weber's support from health care and medical organizations may reflect an effort by the medical industry to have a voice in the state legislature as the COVID-19 pandemic enters its second year. Weber said she believes support from health care professionals has helped her earn the confidence of voters. Some of her competitors said Weber's overwhelming financial lead may have greased the wheels for more contributions. In a race with several like-minded candidates from the same party, donors gravitate to the most successful fundraiser, Parmely said. "If you align enough on the ideas, a lot of times it comes down to who has the most money," Parmely said. "It seems like you're trying to buy good will or influence at that time." Glass, a community organizer, said voters should be skeptical of candidates who draw big donations. "People see money as your viability, but in reality the money is reflective of who you are going to create policy for," Glass said. "In reality it is a small group of people ensuring that their candidate gets elected." Munguia said Weber's campaign war chest represented corporate influence rather than voter confidence, and suggested it could backfire. "I am sharply focused on continuing to get my message out to voters, who I know will see through this barrage of big spending from these groups," Munguia said. Contreras, owner of a customs and logistics firm, amassed his campaign fund mostly from individual contributions ranging from \$100 to several thousand dollars. His donors include business members in the housing and property industry, retirees, and officials with his congregation, Awaken Church. Contreras also drew contributions from California Republicans, including \$2,500 each from Assemblywomen Marie Waldron, R-Escondido, and Melissa Melendez, R-Lake Elsinore, and \$2,000 each from State

Sen. Brian Jones, R-Santee and State Sen. Shannon Grove, R-Bakersfield. He had spent about \$103,000 as of March 20 on digital marketing, postage and political consulting services. His campaign manager, Corey Uhden, said Contreras has raised funds through digital and in-person events and has called on his business network. "We've reached out to voters through both traditional and new media, with great campaign videos that have driven both donations to our campaign and our voter outreach as well," he said. Just as Weber tapped sources in the medical industry and Contreras drew support from small businesses, others in the race brought in donations from groups and people within their professional fields. Labor organizer Leticia Munguia brought in \$4,900 from the National Union of Healthcare Workers, \$4,900 from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees AFSCME, AFL-CIO, Council 36 PAC and \$2,450 from another group associated with the federation. She also received \$4,900 from Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, D-Encinitas, and \$1,000 from San Diego County Supervisor Nora Vargas. Munguia had spent just under \$20,000, delivering campaign literature to homes, using phone banks, text banks, and direct mail. "We've walked dozens of precincts and talked to over 15,000 voters," she said. Parmely's campaign fund stems largely from other educators, including a \$9,700 donation from the California Teachers Association. She has spent about \$10,000 on text-banking, e-mails, her campaign website and door hangers. "This is super grassroots," Parmely said. Glass, with the lowest campaign contributions, received contributions from individuals in amounts ranging from \$100 to \$500, with one donation of \$1,000. She spent \$4,773 on her campaign, relying on her experience in community organizing, with help from volunteers. "I am knocking on doors," she said. "Obviously because of COVID-19, this is a new game. We are utilizing social media ... We're utilizing young people." The primary election takes place Tuesday. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes, the election will go to a runoff on June 8.

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## TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Easter Sunday, April 4, the 94th day of 2021. There are 271 days left in the year.  
**Today's highlight**  
On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr., 39, was shot and killed while standing on a balcony of the Lorraine Motel

in Memphis, Tenn.  
**On this date**  
**In 1841**, President William Henry Harrison succumbed to pneumonia one month after his inauguration, becoming the first U.S. chief executive to die in office.  
**In 1945**, U.S. forces liberated the Nazi concentration camp Ohrdruf in Germany. Hungary was liberated as Soviet forces

cleared German troops.  
**Today's birthdays**  
Recording executive Clive Davis is 89. Author Kitty Kelley is 79. Actor Craig T. Nelson is 77. Actor Christine Lahti is 71. Actor David Cross is 57. Actor Robert Downey Jr. is 56. Actor Nancy McKeon is 55. Actor Barry Pepper is 51. Magician David Blaine is 48.

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