

OPINION

Diversity of thought is critical for democracy

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A pressure cooker that ups suffering



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Special to the
Arizona Daily Star

The following is the opinion and analysis of the writer:

Fall is around the corner, but the temperatures at the U.S.-Mexico borderlands are still high. This summer they spiked to 115 degrees in mid-June, causing the number of migrant deaths and suffering to also spike. Despite a change in season, it is still physically impossible to carry the 6 to 10 gallons of water needed to survive a 3-7 day journey across the Sonoran Desert in scorching heat.

But the situation is more serious than the deadly high temperatures. For more than 25 years the political class has cheered on anti-immigrant policies while wastefully spending billions of dollars on walls

and security. The only tangible result has been militarized borderlands, forcing migrants to cross in more dangerous and desolate areas causing more suffering and death. The cartels and gangs have gotten more sophisticated as they fine-tune their cold-blooded techniques to smuggle people and drugs across the border.

Practically speaking, the U.S.-Mexico border has become a gigantic pressure cooker that exponentially intensifies the danger and fear on the tired, the poor and those huddled masses yearning to be free.

The Trump administration implemented disastrous immigration policies, including cutting more than \$500 million dollars of direct aid to Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras; creating Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), that forced vulnerable immigrants fleeing violence to await their asylum hearings in dangerous Mexican border towns; and misusing

an obscure U.S. public-health order, Title 42, that allowed the government to expel and deny entrance of anyone during a public-health crisis when COVID-19 hit.

For the past year and a half, the U.S. border has been shut down and is nearing a boiling point.

Hope was put on the Biden administration, but it has been painfully slow in terminating Trump's destructive policies. The most significant step it has taken, ending MPP, recently hit a road bump when the Supreme Court upheld an order that the Biden administration reinstate MPP until it provides a fuller explanation of its reasons for terminating the program. Sadly, migrant families don't have the luxury of waiting for administrations to settle and policies to change.

Every day, humanitarian groups like the Green Valley/Sahuarita Samaritans, which is sponsored by the Good Shepherd United Church of Christ, wit-

ness the human carnage created along the border. Water stations set up along the trails migrants follow are seeing record usage.

In the last several months, humanitarian groups working in the desert, including groups from our congregation, have found more migrants in need of emergency help than they did during the entire previous five years.

Last month, my congregation's group stopped to give water to 20 children from Mexico and Guatemala who had been detained by the U.S. Border Patrol along the wall near Sasabe. It is heartbreaking to see innocent children lost in the desert, hanging on for dear life and separated from their families.

Because children are no longer expelled under Title 42, parents are increasingly making agonizing decisions to send children across the border alone. This is just one of the many devastating consequences of retaining inconsistent Title 42 expulsions against parents who know well

that if they want to be with their children again they first have to survive the "Devil's Highway."

Something has to give and release the heavy strain, the suffering, the agony at the border. If we come together as one Arizona community to advocate for an end to inhumane and ineffective policies like Title 42, we can give our border communities, the vital gateways to our nation, a fighting chance to recover from the pandemic.

I hope and pray you will join me in doing so — for the sake of not just desperate migrants fleeing persecution in their home countries, but for the sake of our very own country, which is crushing its border communities and pushing them to the brink of potential collapse.

Reverend Dr. Randy Mayer has been the Lead Pastor of The Good Shepherd United Church of Christ in Sahuarita, Arizona, for 23 years and is a founding member of several border humanitarian groups in the Santa Cruz Valley.