A pressure cooker that ups suffering

The following is the opinion and analysis of the writer:

Fall 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 fearing 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, witness 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, languishing 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.”

Showering money on people and politics, the Biden administration took a road bump when the Supreme Court sided with Trump’s destructive policies. To see previous reader comments and share your own, visit stltoday.com/opinion.

The Good Shepherd United Church of Christ

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