

BRIAN HIGGINS  
26TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRADE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

ASSISTANT WHIP

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-3226

2459 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-3306  
(202) 226-0347 (FAX)

726 EXCHANGE STREET  
SUITE 601  
BUFFALO, NY 14210  
(716) 852-3501  
(716) 852-3929 (FAX)

800 MAIN STREET  
SUITE 3C  
NIAGARA FALLS, NY 14301  
(716) 282-1274  
(716) 282-2479 (FAX)  
higgins.house.gov

December 1, 2020

Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary-Designate of Homeland Security  
Suite 38038  
1401 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington DC 20270

Dear Secretary-Designate Mayorkas,

Congratulations on your historic nomination to serve in the Biden-Harris Administration as the Secretary of Homeland Security. Your distinguished career under the Obama Administration, first as the Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and then as Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security, demonstrates a proven track record and unique ability to lead this department.

On Day 1, you will be faced with significant challenges on our borders precipitated by the lack of capable leadership and strategic vision by the outgoing Administration. The Department of Homeland Security has been used as a tool to further a political agenda without fully considering the policy implications of the top down, haphazard decision-making. It is my hope that your tenure would be characterized by career, technical expertise, robust stakeholder engagement, including meaningful congressional consultation, and coordination with our northern neighbor and trusted ally, Canada.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the daily operation of our shared border with Canada. Restrictions on non-essential travel at our land ports of entry first imposed in March 2020 have frustrated many of my constituents in completing their routine activities. A lack of any meaningful plan from the outgoing administration to address these concerns has added to this frustration. I urge you to work in coordination with our Canadian counterparts to create a management plan that safely allows for renewed expanded travel across the border, incorporating appropriate health screenings and working collaboratively with all relevant authorities. Increasingly, air travel is piloting screening procedures for international flight routes; yet, similar development at land ports of entry crossings have not been prioritized. While I understand the complexities of border management along a 5,525 mile stretch with over 120 varied ports entry, we must endeavor to implement a strategy guided by objective metrics and sound public health data.

In addition, we need to revisit strategic deployment for infrastructure investment at northern border land ports of entry. New technologies, like large scale non-intrusive inspection technology, would expedite crossing for both passenger and commercial vehicles and could have

been used to provide less-restrictive means of travel restrictions during the pandemic. The long-standing focus on security and efficiency at the border must now also incorporate public health. Integrating technology that limits passenger and border official interactions promotes a safer, touchless, and seamless screening environment.

Binational cooperation is integral to a functional land border, yet the current Administration's dysfunctional processes have made this difficult to achieve. A collaborative effort to reopen the border would ensure that there are not duplicative and onerous processes for Canadian and American travelers. For example, Canada has instituted a family reunification policy that the United States has yet to reciprocate. This creates confusion on both sides of the border for families and loved ones who are trying to figure out if they're even eligible to cross. A first step in binational cooperation should be to institute a similar reunification process. In addition, any process should build upon the existing shared information systems and relationships established from decades of collaboration by U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Canada Border Services Agency.

As co-chair of the House of Representatives Northern Border Caucus, Co-Chair of the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group, and advocate for my constituents in Western New York, I look forward to working with you and the Biden-Harris Administration on the above issues and more.

Sincerely,



---

BRIAN HIGGINS  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS