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November 14, 2008

John Podesta
Co- Chair
Presidential Transition Team
Washington, DC 20270

Dear Mr. Podesta,

We appreciate this opportunity to share with you a single and simple recommendation for the 2008 presidential transition. Unlike some requests that may be submitted for your consideration, this one would require immediate action in order to have the desired effect.

We are asking your transition team to intervene to save "Friendship Park" – a place of great historic and cultural significance to the people of the U.S.-Mexico border region. By seeing to it that the Department of Homeland Security halts construction of supplemental border fencing near Friendship Park, the transition team can make a powerful and symbolic gesture of bi-national goodwill that will be hailed by people on both sides of the border.

"Friendship Park" is a half-acre plaza overlooking the Pacific Ocean at the southwest-most corner of the continental United States. The plaza sits atop Monument Mesa, a six-acre mesa within the bounds of California's 800-acre Border Field State Park.

At the center of Friendship Park stands a monument marking the first meeting of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary Commission in 1848. For generations residents of the United States have gathered around this monument to visit through the border fence with family and friends in Tijuana, Mexico. When Border Field State Park was formally inaugurated as a California State Park in 1971, then-First Lady Patricia Nixon presided over a bi-national dedication ceremony at the monument. Clearly the idea of the monument as an international meeting place lies at the very heart of the park's design.

On April 1, 2008, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff waived dozens of environmental and other regulations to expedite construction of 670 miles of supplemental fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border. Operating under the Chertoff waivers, DHS contractors are now beginning construction of a second security wall across the heart of Monument Mesa. This wall will eliminate routine public access to Friendship Park – this despite the fact that illegal border crossings and drug smuggling at Friendship Park are well-controlled by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) through the current practice of monitoring the area through visual observation and advanced surveillance technology.

As is the case with other construction projects along the length of the border, DHS intends to erect the new barriers atop Monument Mesa by year-end 2008. For this reason immediate intervention is required to save Friendship Park. We are encouraged by the recent announcement that CBP has decided not to move forward this year on the construction of three proposed border fence segments in Texas. We feel this cherished part of the California landscape should receive similar consideration.

The plan to eliminate public access to Friendship Park has become for the peoples of the U.S.-Mexico border region a tragic symbol of the "enforcement only" approach to U.S.-Mexico border policy. For two examples of the widespread news coverage which the case of Friendship Park has been receiving, please see the attached stories from the *New York Times* (10/22/08) and from the *Christian Century* magazine (10/7/08). Coverage in the Mexican press has been even more extensive, communicating the dismay of the Mexican people that the U.S. government would eliminate routine public access to this historic gathering place.

Direction to DHS contractors halting all border fence construction on Monument Mesa would send a powerful message to the peoples of the U.S.-Mexico border region. It would also give new staff at DHS time to solicit new proposals for the re-design of security measures that will ensure continued public access to Friendship Park.

Were such direction given by President Bush, it could be celebrated as a noble gesture reaffirming his lifelong commitment to good relations between the peoples of Mexico and the United States. Were such direction insisted upon by the Obama transition team, it would signal the incoming administration's understanding that our national security is enhanced, not diminished, by the promotion of friendship with the people of Mexico.

Should you have any questions about Friendship Park, please do not hesitate to contact us. With best wishes for a successful transition, we thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,


SUSAN A. DAVIS
Member of Congress


BOB FILNER
Member of Congress


DENISE DUCHENY
California State Senator


CHRISTINE KEHOE
California State Senator



MARY SALAS
California Assemblymember



LORI SALDAÑA
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