

Today I wish to speak for the next several minutes about one of the people we met, a fellow whose name I think the Presiding Officer will probably remember. His name is Ramiro Garza, Jr., and he goes by Ram. I think he has probably gone by Ram all his life. I will always remember him as Ram. He is an outstanding Border Patrol officer whom we met last week in McAllen, TX, while we were visiting the Mexican border in South Texas—the three of us, the Presiding Officer, Senator RON JOHNSON, and yours truly.

This is Ram. Some of my colleagues may remember the pictures last summer, when an unprecedented surge of Central American children and families arrived at our Texas border. They are the kind of pictures that really burn into our memories for a lot of us. The pictures we are more used to seeing may be from war zones than to see here in our own country, with hundreds upon hundreds of unaccompanied minors and a lot of mothers with young children in search of protection, literally turning themselves in to our Border Patrol agents; not running away from them, but turning themselves in and asking for asylum.

The Rio Grande Valley in South Texas is where Agent Ram Garza works. Ram is the acting patrol agent in charge of the Rio Grande Valley sector of the U.S. Border Patrol. The Rio Grande Valley where Ram works is the epicenter of that humanitarian crisis we witnessed last year. That is because most of the migrants were from the northern triangle of Central America, and they were fleeing violence, fleeing economic desperation, and fleeing a sense of hopelessness in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

These migrants had to travel some 1,500 miles through Mexico, risking life and limb to get to the United States. The shortest route—though by no means an easy one—runs up the east side of Mexico from Central America to the South Texas border, and many of the people who are making that 1,500 mile trek did it on top of a train. In fact, they did it on a series of trains—freight trains, not passenger trains—where people actually get on top of the trains and try to hold on for a 1,500 mile trip. Some of them succeeded and some of them didn't. Some of them fell down between the trains and cars and lost their lives. Some made it to the border. Some fell off the train. Some got hurt. Some got on another train. Some didn't make it. But many of them rode on top of those trains to get here, and they suffered violence. If they made it safely on the train, a lot of them suffered violence at the hands of predatory gangs along the way.

When these children showed up in South Texas, they literally overwhelmed the Border Patrol stations along the border. These stations are only supposed to hold detained migrants for a short period of time as they are processed for removal back to where they came from, or for deten-

tion. Usually along the border, they deal with the young men. However, last year stations were packed with mothers and young children who were trapped there for days as our government struggled to find suitable shelters and decide what to do with them. There were no adequate meals, no clothing, no diapers. There is literally no room at times for someone to lie down, either.

Faced with this human crisis, Customs and Border Protection agents sprang to action. Among their leaders was our agent here today whom I especially want to put a spotlight on: Ramiro Garza. With the help of his colleagues, Ram went above and beyond to process the arrivals, according to the law, while also responding to the human needs of these people. Agent Garza helped create an emergency operations center to manage the crisis and worked to transfer unaccompanied children to the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Perhaps most impressive, though, he worked with his colleagues to convert an enormous abandoned warehouse that we visited in McAllen, TX. I will not soon forget that. It is just a few miles from our border with Mexico. He turned it into a processing center for detained migrants and they did it in 18 days. They looked at a place—and they described what it was like before they started working on it, and then what they did in 19 days, they did pretty remarkable stuff. And Ram, whom we honor especially here today, and those who worked with him deserve our recognition.

This processing center helped greatly relieve the crowded and inadequate conditions in multiple Border Patrol stations along the border. When Senator RON JOHNSON, our Presiding Officer, Senator SASSE, and I visited this past weekend the extraordinary processing center that Agent Garza helped set up, we were amazed to see a cavernous, orderly center equipped with the humanitarian necessities needed for hundreds of children and their parents. The center also had space for Central American officials to work with Customs and Border Protection in order to properly identify migrants and arrange for speedier repatriations, in many cases to their home countries, where appropriate.

Agent Garza was instrumental in designing the processing facility and getting it up and running quickly. Today he is in charge of that facility.

This is just the latest achievement in Agent Garza's career with the Border Patrol. As I said, known most of his life as Ram, he grew up in the Rio Grande Valley. There he attended high school and the University of Texas-Pan American. He joined the Border Patrol in 1996. His first assignment was to the Brownsville station in the Rio Grande sector. In 2004, he was promoted to supervisory Border Patrol agent at the Rio Grande City station. That was followed by tours at the Rio Grande sec-

tor's intelligence office and at Harlingen station.

Agent Garza also worked on detail here in Washington, DC, where his duties included supporting the agency's efforts in biometric collection—something we think is very important. While he is helping to humanely process migrants apprehended at the border, Agent Garza also cares for his own family—his wife and their own two children. We thank them for sharing with us their husband and their dad—a very good man.

The Department of Homeland Security and our Nation are truly blessed by Ram's exemplary service.

Agent Garza, if you are out there listening, we want to thank you for what you do each and every day for all of us. We thank you for your tireless service to our Nation for all of these years.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING

Mr. CARPER. As the Presiding Officer, along with Senator JOHNSON and myself, met the men and women of the Border Patrol last weekend, including Agent Garza, we heard about their work, and it is hard to ignore the fact that they might not know if they will be getting a paycheck next month when the continuing resolution which funds the Department of Homeland Security expires in actually about 2 weeks, on February 27.

Many of them don't know if they will be able to obtain the technology or supplies they need to do the jobs as effectively as possible either. This is not the way we would want to be treated if we were in their shoes, but it is how I think we are treating the men and women who work around the clock to protect our borders and to keep our Nation safe and secure. Those of us here in Congress can change that, and I think we should.

Two of our colleagues—Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN of New Hampshire and BARBARA MIKULSKI of Maryland—have introduced a clean appropriations bill that would fund the Department of Homeland Security for the balance of the fiscal year, up through the end of September. Overall, the funding provisions in their bill, S. 272, which I understand both Democrats and Republicans on the Appropriations Committee agreed to in December—just 2 months ago—provide just under \$40 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Homeland Security for the remainder of the fiscal year. I think that is an increase from year to year of about \$400 million. It sounds like a lot of money. It is about a 1-percent increase above 2014 funding. This bill would ensure that Department employees get their paychecks on time and have the resources they need to best meet the Department's critical mission and the security needs of our Nation.

The clean bill put forward by Senators SHAHEEN and MIKULSKI would

take additional measures to secure order and enforce our immigration laws—something that I know is a priority to me and I know to our colleagues on both sides of the aisle. In fact, most of the funding increase in the Shaheen-Mikulski bill would go to border security and immigration enforcement.

The bill our colleagues have put forward contains a little more than \$10 million for Customs and Border Protection—an increase of approximately \$118 million above last year's enacted level. This funding level would support the largest operational force levels for the agency in its history—a total of more than 21,000 Border Patrol agents and nearly 24,000 enforcement officers.

But if the Department of Homeland Security remains on a continuing resolution—or worse, shuts down—we just won't be as effective as we ought to be in securing our Nation's borders. If Congress forces a shutdown of the Department—I hope we won't—frontline personnel would be asked to continue to work without pay. We met some of them just a few days ago when we were on the border. They don't look like fast boats, but they move pretty good. We went zipping up and down the Rio Grande River looking for people trying to slip across the border, looking for folks who were trying to bring contraband—drugs, illegal drugs—across the border.

There are some 40,000 Customs and Border Protection officers who are needed to keep our borders secure. If we allow the funding for the Department to lapse on February 27, we are going to expect these guys and gals to still come to work. We are not going to pay them, at least not in a timely way.

If Congress continues to keep the Department on a continuing resolution, Immigration and Customs Enforcement will see a shortfall—I am told a little over half a billion dollars—to respond to unaccompanied minors and families with children.

In addition, Customs and Border Protection won't be able to replace or upgrade border surveillance technology, including upgrades to obsolete remote and mobile video surveillance systems in the high-risk area of the Rio Grande Valley.

The drone is a pilotless aircraft. We fly aircraft similar to these all over the planet. We fly a number of them along the border of our country with Mexico in an effort to try to see, visualize, and detect people making their way to our border, maybe just to come across, maybe to flee a bad situation in their own country. Maybe it is to bring drugs or other things that are illegal into our country. We are not going to be able to replace or upgrade this kind of technology and bring it to high-risk areas along the Rio Grande Valley.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson recently said—I want to quote Secretary Johnson just briefly. He said, “Border security is not free. The men and women of [the De-

partment of Homeland Security] need a partner in Congress to fund their efforts.” He added, “Time is running out.” Those were his words. I couldn't agree with him more.

In the next week or so, I pray that those of us in Congress will come together and will do what I believe is the right thing; that is, support the passage of a clean full-year appropriations bill for the remainder of this fiscal year for the Department of Homeland Security and do it by February 27.

After we have done that, for God's sake, let's get to work on crafting thoughtful, comprehensive, bipartisan immigration reform law for our country, one that better secures our borders, one that strengthens our economy, and one that reduces our budget deficit over the next two decades by hundreds of billions of dollars. That is what we ought to do. I would pledge here today to my colleagues, Democrats and Republicans, one or two Independents, and our Presiding Officer, that we will meet you in the middle and do our dead level best to make sure we meet our responsibilities.

With that, I am looking for others on the floor who may want to speak. I don't see anybody.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO DEPARTING STAFFERS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today I would like to pay tribute to two of the hardest working staffers in the Senate: John Ashbrook and Russell Coleman.

RUSSELL COLEMAN

First, there is Russell, a dyed-in-the-wool Kentuckian. He is a huge Wildcats fan. The only words one associates with Russell more often than “affable” are these two: “persuasive” and “determined.” When Russell sets his mind to something, there is not much you can do to stop him—not that you would want to because he is one of the friendliest guys you will ever meet. More than a few times, you will see a group entering a meeting with Russell, spoiling for a fight. Then the door opens, and they are his best friends. It is quite a skill. It is nearly as impressive as this one: Russell Coleman knows just about everybody in Kentucky. His Rolodex is something to behold.

He has done a lot of great work here in the Senate. This one-time FBI agent is passionate about law-enforcement issues. This one-time intern is passionate about mentoring others, letting those around him know, no matter how junior, that their contributions do matter.

Russell is also a great fighter. That tough will has helped Russell push through adversity with grace and with grit. Faith is a big part of Russell's life too. It is something he shares with Chaplain Black every Friday in Bible study.

Russell is ready to share more of himself, too, with his family, his wife Ashley and his children, Annie and Clay. They are all making the move back to Louisville. They will have a lot more time together, and I know they and Russell couldn't be happier.

So congratulations, Russell, and thanks for your service.

JOHN ASHBROOK

Let me tell you about John Ashbrook. John has been with me since I first became Republican leader. He was a fresh-faced kid back then, a young guy from Cincinnati who wanted nothing more than to work in the White House. I am grateful he chose to work for me instead. I am grateful John was willing to transfer his allegiance across the Ohio River for the past 8 years because John Ashbrook is easy-mannered, matched with unbending will. You don't see that very often. He has been an important player on our staff not only for his professionalism but for his character too.

John is known around the Capitol as a founding member of the Senate Republican Communications Center. With John's help, it has been a real success.

The Capitol is going to be a different place without John's laughter echoing in the corridors. Every reporter knows his name. Every member of my staff knows his smile. It is pretty hard to miss.

John, muffin in hand, is usually the first guy in every morning. Many hours later, he is often the last one out. I appreciate it deeply.

I know John's wife Kate takes a somewhat different view. I can't blame her. Kate is ready for dinners without John's Blackberry at the table, and John is ready to spend more time with his three beautiful daughters—Margaret, Abigail, and Charlotte, all born during his service here. John's daughters and Kate mean everything to him, and I couldn't be happier that John will be seeing more of all of them very soon.

CELEBRATING THE 206TH ANNIVERSARY OF PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I wish to celebrate one of the most admired, well-known Americans and Presidents this great Nation has ever seen. Just 56 years ago, Carl Sandburg addressed a joint session of Congress and remarked about him: “Not often in the story of mankind does a man arrive on Earth who is both steel and velvet, who is as hard as rock and soft as drifting fog, who holds in his heart and mind the paradox of terrible storm and peace unspeakable and perfect.”

Those words echo today, as it marks the arrival as the 206th anniversary of