

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Delaware.

CENTRAL AMERICA

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, last month, just hours after Congress passed bipartisan legislation to fully fund our Federal Government, I was privileged to join with Senator JEFF MERKLEY of Oregon and four Members of the House of Representatives, including our at-large Congresswoman from Delaware, LISA BLUNT ROCHESTER, to lead a congressional delegation to Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—three countries that are oftentimes collectively referred to as the Northern Triangle.

Our delegation was on a factfinding mission. We wanted to drill down on the root causes of illegal immigration from Central America and assess the effectiveness of a new approach in recent years to help improve conditions on the ground in those three countries.

On our flight to Guatemala, several of us watched as President Trump—in order to build his long-promised wall—declared a national emergency, even though while illegal immigration spiked in the last couple of months across our southern border, if you go back to 2001 through the end of 2018, it has actually dropped by, believe it or not, 80 percent.

As former chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, I understand the need for secure borders, and I have supported efforts to enhance border security over the last two decades that I have served in this body.

I have been down to Central America any number of times with people like Gen. John Kelly, when he was the SOUTHCOM commander, with Jeh Johnson, with Ron JOHNSON, both of whom served as chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and John McCain. We went into that part of the world and along our border with Mexico to better understand what our needs are for border security.

Since 2003, the United States has spent, believe it or not, \$263 billion—that is almost one-quarter of a trillion dollars—on border security.

We have doubled the number of border agents. We have deployed hundreds of miles of barriers and roads in places where they are most effective. We have funded highly sophisticated surveillance aircraft, equipment on drones and airplanes, helicopters, mile-high dirigibles, along with motion detectors, high-speed boats, tunnel detectors, and a lot more.

The approach on border security at our border with Mexico needs to be multilayered, and it is. There are some places barriers do make sense—a lot of places, in fact. There are some places that actually walls—the kind President Trump has envisioned, think San Diego and maybe Juarez—make sense, but there are a lot of other places where different kinds of barriers make sense.

In some places, roads alongside of barriers make sense.

We have deployed aircraft. We have deployed fixed-wing aircraft. We have deployed helicopters. We have deployed drones. If you just put them out there by themselves, they are not going to do much good, but if you put highly sophisticated equipment on each of those platforms, they give us the ability to see from our border into Mexico as far as 20, 25 miles in all kinds of weather—people as small as children who are approaching our border—and then we know where to deploy our Border Patrol to meet them and intercept them.

We can put the same kind of sophisticated surveillance equipment on dirigibles that go up 5,000 feet, 10,000 feet into the air. We can put them on towers that are mobile, towers that are stationary along the border as well.

We can put people on horseback. We can put, believe it or not, some of our Border Patrol officers on horseback. The reason we do that is, in areas with high vegetation, the Border Patrol officer on a horse—a big horse—can see over the vegetation and pick up people trying to come across the border illegally.

In some places, boats make sense, high-speed boats. In other places, boat ramps make sense. If you don't have boat ramps, you can't put the boat in, and you don't have much mobility.

Those are some of the things we have done in terms of providing better border security.

The encouraging news is, a lot of it has worked. A lot of it has worked, but we could build a wall from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean, and if that is all we do, people are still going to come to this country—not so much from Mexico. People used to come in huge numbers from Mexico.

If you look back in the history of the last especially 15 years, most of the folks who were coming here illegally were coming from Mexico across our borders. Today, it is quite different. There are more Mexicans going back into Mexico than there are Mexicans coming into the United States. Most of the illegal immigration is not coming from Mexico. It is coming from Guatemala. It is coming from Honduras. It is coming from El Salvador.

The trek from the Northern Triangle—these countries right here—up through Mexico to our border is over 1,000 miles, probably closer to 1,500 miles, depending on how you want to get there.

The spike in immigration we have seen in the last several months is mostly from Guatemala's mountainous highlands. They have a lot of indigenous people, and they don't have a very good lifestyle. They have a lot of malnourishment, a lot of stunted growth, and not a lot in terms of encouragement and economic opportunity. Let me tell you a quick story of the reason why these people are trying to get out of there.

In the southern part of our State, Sussex County is our biggest county.

We raise enormous numbers of chickens there. For every person that live in Delaware, there are 300 chickens. I know the Presiding Officer has a lot of chickens in his State, too. We have a lot of folks who come up, including from Guatemala, and work in poultry processing plants. They are good workers. They work hard.

We have a nonprofit in southern Delaware, in Georgetown, DE, called La Esperanza, which means “hope.” They work with indigenous populations, illegal and legal migrants, who have come to southern Delaware. A couple years ago, I was visiting La Esperanza, and they told me the story about a young boy and his younger sister who fled Guatemala. They came to the United States and, ultimately, to Delaware.

This is why they came. The 15-year-old boy in Guatemala was approached by gangs in his community. They said: We want you to join our gang.

He said: Let me talk to my parents first before I do that.

He knew his parents wouldn't be too excited with that. He talked to his parents, who said: You are not going to join a gang. We don't want you to do that. Just tell them no.

He avoided the gang members for a while, but they finally caught him and said: Are you going to join our gang?

He said: I talked to my parents, and they don't want me to do that, so not now. I am not going to do it now.

They said: We have a message for you and your parents. If you don't join our gang, somebody in your family is going to die.

He went home and told his parents, and their message to him was: Join the gang. Just don't do anything stupid.

So he joined the gang. They have to go through an initiation ritual, and as part of that ritual, he was called on to rape his 13-year-old sister. He reported what was expected of him to his parents, and within a week he and his sister were on their way out of that country.

The gangs in these countries, especially in Guatemala, are entrepreneurial. They may be involved in trafficking people. They may be involved in trafficking drugs. They are really good at extortion—extorting money from small businesses and going to a business and saying: I want you to pay me protection money. If you provide protection money, I will see that you are not harmed.

The merchant says: Who are you protecting me from?

You are actually being protected from the guy who is trying to extort money from you, and if you don't pay the money, they will kill you. It is just like that. As for the rate of extortion in these three countries from gangs who do multiple kinds of crimes, that is one of their favorites.

The reason why people live lives of misery has a lot to do with us—because we are addicted to drugs. The drugs are trafficked through these three countries, and we are complicit in their misery.

A Catholic priest testified before the Homeland Security Committee a couple of years ago. He described a situation where our drug addiction makes life miserable in these three countries. Then, when they try to get out, we make it difficult to impossible to get into our country.

The priest who was our witness that day said: It is a little bit like the fire department visiting a house down here. The fire department goes into the house. There is no fire. The fire department goes into the house, and they start a fire. When the people try to run out of the house, the fire department leaves the house, locks the door, and drives away.

That is really a pretty good example of what we have done in Central America. We have lit the fire. We have left the family in the house. We have locked the door and driven away. I think that is morally wrong, and we can do better than that.

As it turns out, aside from spending \$263 billion along the border for security in the last 18 years or so, someone has come up with a better idea. It is not a new idea. It is an idea based on something called Plan Colombia. Plan Colombia was developed 20 years ago, when in Bogota, the capital of Colombia, you had the FARC, the leftist guerrillas trying to take down the government, and drug lords and drug gangs trying to take down the government of Colombia. One day, a bunch of gunmen rounded up the supreme court justices of Colombia, took them into a room, and shot them to death.

Colombia was teetering, and there were questions: Are they going to be able to make it? Some very brave Colombian leaders stood up and said: We are not going to let this happen. We are not going to let these guys take down our country. Our President then, Bill Clinton, and a fellow who was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Joe Biden, found common cause with the leaders of Colombia. Basically, the Colombians developed a plan that would help to stabilize their government and enable them to restore order, rule of law, and economic prosperity, and we helped them. I will give one example of what we did.

The Presiding Officer spent a lot of time in the military. One of the things we did is that we provided helicopters so that the military of Colombia and the police of Colombia had mobility. They could go over the mountainous rivers and country and track down the bad guys. That is what they did with our help.

We helped them to figure out how to collect revenues. They didn't collect many revenues, and the wealthy people of that country didn't pay much taxes at all. We taught them how to do a better job in revenues and to use that to help to develop their government institutions. The people in Colombia did the heavy lifting. We helped. It is like they say in Home Depot: You can do it; we can help.

The Presiding Officer has heard me say many times in the Environment and Public Works Committee: Find out what works, and do more of that.

Plan Colombia worked. It took a long time. I am an old Navy guy. It reminds me of trying to change the course of an aircraft carrier. You stick with it, and you can make sure to change the course of an aircraft carrier. It doesn't happen fast. Plan Colombia has taken years to work, but it has worked.

About 3 or 4 years ago, when we were starting to see a real surge—again, not from Mexican immigration illegally into our country but from these three countries—President Obama called on Joe Biden to take off-the-shelf Plan Colombia, and see if it might be possible to develop a Central American version of Plan Colombia. The idea would be to focus on three or four areas. We would provide some of the money, but these countries would provide a lot more because it is their country. It is not our country, but we are complicit in their misery. So we have an obligation to help them—a moral obligation.

These are the three areas of focus of the Alliance for Prosperity—the modern-day, Central American version of Plan Colombia. One is economic hope and economic opportunity. That is one. That is one of the major drivers of people getting out of there—lack of economic opportunity. Two is violence and the lack of rule of law. Three is just corruption. Corruption is endemic in their Federal government—the national government—in State and local governments, and in business. It is just endemic. Those are the three buckets that the Alliance for Prosperity was designed to address. We put up some of the money. The other countries put up a good deal more.

One example is El Salvador. For every dollar we put up, they put up \$7. We used that money in El Salvador to, among other things, target the cities with the most crime. We used some of our resources but a lot more of their resources. The crime in those 50 cities is down dramatically in the last couple of years.

In Honduras the murder rate is down by about 35 percent. These three countries vie for murder capital of the world and have for some time. The murder rate in Honduras is down by 35 percent or 40 percent. The murder rates in Guatemala and El Salvador over the last 3 years are down by half. Would we still feel comfortable in those neighborhoods? Probably not, but it is better than what it was.

In Honduras, one of the things they did is basically that they fired one-third of their police officers and replaced them with vetted units. With that in mind, they did a much better job on extortion. They did a much better job on kidnapping and actually bringing to trial and sentencing the folks who are committing the crimes.

USAID is working down there in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador,

and in the capital of Guatemala, creating almost like tech centers where young entrepreneurs can start their own businesses. They get some help from us and some coaching from us, and they are starting to lead an economic recovery.

These are beautiful countries—lush and with beautiful beaches in some places. So they are attractive for tourism. They have, for the most part, very fertile soil, and with the right kind of help, coaching, and mentoring, they can do a much better job feeding themselves and exporting a lot of what they raise.

Things are starting to happen. Again, it is like that aircraft carrier I talked about. It is slow at first and, then, more perceptible as time goes by.

In San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, we used Federal-American—money in order to leverage the Howard G. Buffett Foundation to go—literally, in the middle of the city—into 17 acres of what used to be a beautiful park and was later riddled with crime, and to clean it up and make it beautiful again for the people of that city.

One multinational company has come down into one of these countries and put millions of dollars into creating a DNA facility to help in solving crimes.

Little by little, things are getting better. There are still problems in Guatemala and among the highlands indigenous people who are still trying to get out of there. Ninety percent of the immigration right now is out of that part of Guatemala.

The last thing I will say is this. They just had an election in El Salvador 4 weeks ago. The current President is a 75-year-old guerilla leader who was a close friend of Venezuela's leader and was at Maduro's inauguration a month or so ago. He is friendly with the Chinese and friendly with the Cubans. He is leaving. He is stepping down as the President of that country in a couple of months.

Who is going to succeed him? It is the 38-year-old mayor of San Salvador, who gets economic development. He is free of corruption. He is someone who has a good relationship with our embassy there, and he is highly regarded by our folks. He is an honest guy, full of energy. In his campaign, he was the first candidate for President in the history of the country who has gotten over 50 percent. It didn't have to go to a runoff. It is an amazing development. He harnessed social media to get elected.

Meanwhile, there is going to be a Presidential election in Guatemala in June. Jimmy Morales is the President there. He is somebody whom Vice President Biden and I tried to mentor. Initially, it started out very promising. Then, more recently, there are real concerns about corruption involving his family. His time as President will expire about the middle of this year, but in Guatemala the three frontrunners to run for president are

all women. The person who is believed to be the frontrunner of them all is a woman named Thelma Aldana, who is the immediate past Attorney General. She is tough on crime and tough on corruption. She has been in this country some this month and had the opportunity to talk with Vice President Biden to get some encouragement from him.

Joe Biden is beloved in Delaware and in some other places around the country, but they really love him there because he has been interested in root causes—not just in treating the symptoms of the problems and challenges on the border but actually helping to address the root causes.

The fellow who has just been elected President of El Salvador is a 38-year-old millennial. His social media people have now started to help the former Attorney General who is running for President of Guatemala.

As the Presiding Officer and my colleagues know, the most important ingredient in the success of any organization I have ever seen is leadership. It is leadership.

We are seeing a changing of the guard not only in terms of age but also in terms of just where they come from, on a scale of 1 to 100.

The last thing I want to mention—if I could find my spot here in my notes—is that none of this is easy, but it basically says that we have a moral obligation to the folks down here. We make their lives miserable because of our drug addiction, and we ought to help them. They have to do most of the work, but we have to help them. We can't just help them for a couple of weeks or a couple of months or a couple of years, as we found out in Colombia; we have to stick with this a good deal longer to help change the culture of these countries.

I am encouraged to say that change is happening, and we should keep it going. There is a sense of optimism that is beginning to emerge in these countries. I think there are some reasons to be encouraged that a plan modeled after Plan Colombia and tailored especially for this part of the world can actually succeed. If we don't give up and especially if they don't give up, it very well will.

P.S. The cost of actually capturing somebody on our border who is starting to come in illegally, detaining them, putting them in a holding camp or a detention center, feeding them, providing healthcare, and eventually deporting them and sending them back down to wherever they came from, I am told is \$27,000 a person—\$27,000 a person.

These people love their countries, and given a chance, they would much rather stay down there. They would much rather stay down there. They might like to come up to visit and maybe do some work sometime and go back home. But they want to have a decent life. Frankly, if we will help them realize that, they will stay down

there. They may come up as tourists, and maybe we can go down there as tourists. We heard that over and over.

The last thing we heard down there is that they love America. They love America. They are mindful of what we are trying to do to help them. They are grateful for the help we are providing. I know a bunch of them. I met a lot of them down there. Some of them live in my State. For the most part, they are good and decent people. They deserve our help. I am proud of the support this Congress has provided for the last 4 years for their lives and prosperity. My hope is that we will continue to do that and continue to use that money to leverage a lot of good work not only for those countries but for nonprofits, NGOs, foundations, and private companies, and that together we will get the job done. I am encouraged.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I really want to say to my friend, Senator JEFF MERKLEY, who went down to this part of the world any number of times as a young man and went back again last month still as a young man, that he has provided a lot of great insight. It has been a joy going with him and now working with him on this as we go forward.

I yield the floor.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The Senator from Arkansas.

THE AMERICAN LEGION'S CENTENNIAL

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, the American Legion, the Nation's largest wartime veterans service organization, is celebrating its centennial this year. I rise today to recognize this milestone.

For the past 100 years, the American Legion has been a leading advocate for veterans and their families. The Legion has played a role in crafting legislation, shaping policies, expanding services, and creating generations of civic-minded Americans.

Founded in Paris following World War I, the American Legion was officially chartered by Congress on September 16, 1919. Since its founding, Legionnaires have proudly worked to strengthen our country and our communities, while upholding the promise our country made to those who have worn our Nation's uniform.

The list of achievements that the Legion has helped fight for is long and includes the creation of the U.S. Veterans' Bureau in 1924, the forerunner of the Veterans' Administration. Decades later, the Legion was active in elevating to Cabinet-level status the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Following the American Legion's lead, Congress adopted a flag code to formally lay out the protocol for carrying and displaying our Nation's banner. The Legion continues to actively support the constitutional amendment to protect the American flag from desecration.

During World War II, the American Legion drafted legislation that would become the GI bill. Legionnaires were

instrumental in securing passage of this landmark legislation that helped returning troops further their education, buy houses, and start businesses. It also established hiring privileges for veterans.

The Legion continues its strong advocacy for improving these and other benefits. Its efforts were vital in the passage of the Post-9/11 GI bill and the enhancement measure passed in 2017, which bears the name of a former American Legion commander, the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act.

After a century of service, Legionnaires remain just as committed to advocating on behalf of our veterans today.

Last month, I met with members of the American Legion Department of Arkansas who were visiting the Nation's Capital to voice their support for the organization's 2019 priorities. This includes supporting the VA's efforts to reduce veteran suicides, improving healthcare for women veterans, fighting veteran homelessness, ensuring GI bill benefits, and ensuring benefits to veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. I am optimistic about the progress we will make on these important issues because of the excellent and active work of the American Legion Department of Arkansas, which has more than 10,000 members in nearly 150 posts throughout the State.

The Arkansas Department of the American Legion was incorporated on May 12, 1919. National headquarters records show it was the first incorporation of the organization in the United States. There is a proud history of involvement in all corners of the State, ranging from the annual fallen heroes ceremony to the Law Enforcement Officer of the Year program.

I have had the privilege of participating in Legion events around the State, including honoring the Arkansans who paid the ultimate sacrifice, celebrating the milestones of the posts, and recognizing young Arkansans who have been distinguished by Legionnaires. The Legion rightfully prides itself as being actively involved in the community and teaching Arkansas youth how to be good citizens. Through a variety of programs and activities—Boys and Girls State Programs, support of the Boy Scouts of America, and the American Legion Baseball Program, to name a few—it encourages fostering a dedication to civic responsibility, promoting American values, and serving others.

For 100 years, the American Legion has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of veterans and their families. In honor of their centennial, Congress approved minting a coin to recognize its milestone. I was a proud cosponsor of the bill and support its passage to commemorate the legacy of the American Legion and the thousands of men and women who have supported its mission and upheld the four pillars of its founding: veterans affairs and rehabilitation,