

Whether this is a test or a threat or an effort to seek some kind of leverage remains to be seen, but what is abundantly clear is that Iran has no intention of taking its foot off the gas.

Over the past 2 months, U.S. military assets in Iraq have been attacked by drones laden with explosives, and all signs point to the responsibility being on Iranian-backed militias. Just last month, the world watched in horror as the conflict between Israel and Palestine gave way to more violence and destruction than we have seen in years. This was a proxy war waged by Iran against the Jewish State. Hamas—that proxy—receives significant financial support from Iran, which is the No. 1 state sponsor of terrorism in the world.

Now take these actions over the past few months, and add that to what we have seen over the last several years. Iran has arrested and continues to detain American citizens. It engages in gross human rights abuses. It backs terrorists around the world. We have also watched as Iran has blatantly ignored the restrictions on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the so-called JCPOA, which is designed to prevent Iran from enriching uranium and building a nuclear weapon.

During the time that it violated the terms of the JCPOA, Iran was led by President Hassan Rouhani, broadly considered to be a moderate when compared to his expected successor. Following this election, Iran's already extreme President will be replaced by an even more punishing leader. The United States cannot simply stand by and enable Iran to continue down its current path.

In recent years, Iran has felt significant pressure from the United States and our allies. The Trump administration withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and placed sanctions on hundreds of businesses and individuals who helped finance Iran's illicit activities, and there is no question that Iran stood the most to lose from the historic Abraham peace accords that were brokered this last year. This took a number of Arab countries that were nominally adversaries, and they joined together to declare their willingness to let Israel live in peace and to recognize it as a legitimate state.

The Biden administration has already loosened the pressure valve on Iran. President Biden has made it clear his intent to revive the Iranian nuclear deal no matter what the cost. At the same time, the administration has rolled back sanctions that would have provided the U.S. maximum leverage to bring Iran to the negotiating table.

By simply signaling his intent, the Biden administration has already emboldened and encouraged Iran's malign activities. Iran did not play by the rules of the JCPOA the first time around, so there is absolutely no reason to believe that this will change when a radical mass murderer assumes the Presidency.

Over the last few days, the leaders of the G7 have reaffirmed the need to stop

Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. I agree that this is one of the most critical responsibilities of our time, but a flawed agreement that relieves pressure on Iran, without concessions, with regard to its nuclear weapon aspiration will only continue to embolden the regime. Iran's belligerence cannot be rewarded with sanctions relief, and the administration should not continue to squander our leverage.

The Biden administration needs to resume the maximum pressure campaign on Iran, and I would encourage the President to work closely with us in Congress to identify an approach that is effective, comprehensive, and built on bipartisan foundations. We have to stop Iran from ever achieving a nuclear weapons capability.

I asked the Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, during her confirmation hearing: Should the United States prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon? She said: Yes. She didn't hesitate.

I asked Ambassador Burns, the new CIA Director, the same question: Should we let Iran get a nuclear weapon? He said "no" without hesitation.

I find that encouraging from these two new members of President Biden's Cabinet, but we need to work together, as Republicans and Democrats, as Members of Congress, with the administration to ensure that our efforts to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons can last beyond the term of a single President or Congress.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I am here to talk about the escalating crisis on our southern border.

I am the ranking Republican, the senior Republican, on the Homeland Security Committee, which is a committee that has, among other things, oversight over what happens at the Department of Homeland Security and therefore at the border and with the Customs and Border Patrol and has other responsibilities. We have been looking at this issue carefully over the past few months. We have been trying to figure out how we can address this surge at the border that is really overwhelming the Border Patrol.

It is obviously about people, but it is also about drugs. Unfortunately, there are more and more drugs coming over the southern border as well, which, in effect, makes States like mine, Ohio—which is not on the southern border; we are actually on the northern border—part of the border, in effect, because we are affected by what happens down there.

At one time, most of the most deadly drug, fentanyl, which is a synthetic opioid, was coming from China. Frankly, a lot of it was coming from the mail system, from our own Postal Service. We passed legislation here in this body. I have worked with Republicans and Democrats alike on it, and we have largely been able to deal with that issue, but those same drugs have now moved to Mexico, and now they are coming across our southern border. So, if you look at the amount of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids—again, the deadliest of all drugs at a time when more people are dying from overdoses in our country than ever in history—more and more of that is coming across the southern border in addition to the cocaine and crystal meth and other dangerous drugs that were already coming.

This is about the immigration system not working properly and having a huge surge of individuals—family members, unaccompanied kids. It is also about not having control of that border and having this contraband come over—in the case of these dangerous drugs—that is actually resulting in overdoses and deaths all over the United States, including in my State of Ohio.

So how can we tell that it is getting worse? I would just look at these numbers here. This is the latest from the Customs and Border Protection folks of its encounters at the southwest border.

Remember, we had a crisis in May of 2019, which was deemed to be the worst crisis of its kind, and it was pretty bad. We had a lot of unaccompanied kids coming at that time and a lot of family members as well as individuals. The high point was here at 144,000 individuals. We are now, as of May of 2021, which was last month, at 180,000.

Some of my colleagues have said: Well, it is getting better. I don't see that it is getting better, and the numbers don't say it is getting better. It is really at the point now where it is overwhelming those people whose jobs are to try to control the border. They just don't have the resources to be able to handle this.

It is also overwhelming our system all the way through. A lot of this is of families and kids coming in, as an example, and we don't have the facilities to take care of these children.

During this first period of time—here is the Biden inauguration. After the inauguration, this huge increase started to happen, and it was because policies were changed. A new President who is coming in has the right to change policies, but in my view, what a President doesn't have the right to do is to change policies without preparing for it.

It is one thing to say we are not going to have an emergency on the southern border anymore and that we are going to do away with title 42—a provision that says, if you have somebody coming over the border during COVID, he can be turned back—and immediately the President is saying: No,

we are not going to use that anymore for unaccompanied kids. They have also now not used it for most families coming over. So not having title 42 was a shock to the system. You had a situation where people were being turned away because of COVID one day, and the next day, they were not, and you can see the result.

By the way, these are people who come from all over the world, but a lot come from the Northern Triangle countries—the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Recently, the President of Honduras talked about this, and I know the President of Guatemala has talked about it. What the President of Guatemala has said, in essence, is that the traffickers, the smugglers, heard this. So they came down to our country and said: Let's go to the northern border and make that difficult and arduous journey—it is sometimes a very dangerous journey for these children—because the Biden administration has said that there would no longer be this title 42 in place so that we can turn you away at the border. In fact, he said: We want to reunite families and kids, and that means come to the border, and you can come into the country. That is what has happened.

Look, I believe we ought to have a legal immigration system that is very healthy in this country. I believe in immigration. I think it is a very important part of who we are as Americans. We take more people in legally every year than any other country in the world, and that is over a million people a year. I think that has been good for our country. It is part of the fabric of our society. We should want immigrants to come but to come in a legal and orderly way.

And not only is this surge overwhelming the border, but it is really not fair to all of those people who have been waiting in line for years and years to come to our country from a country like El Salvador or Honduras or Guatemala or Mexico, for that matter, people who want to come legally, people who are reuniting with their families legally here or have skills that we want in this country. We should encourage that. But this is happening in a way that is not orderly, and it is happening because there has been a change in policy.

The other big change in policy is that if you come, people were told—this is after the inauguration—then if you apply for asylum, meaning that you have a credible fear of persecution back home, so you apply for asylum, you will be allowed to come into the country. In other words, there won't be an adjudication of that. There won't be a decision made. Whether you apply properly or not, you will be told you can come into the country.

So I went down to the border a couple months ago and was able to go there with Secretary Mayorkas and my colleague on the committee, Senator PETERS, who is the Democratic chair-

man of the committee, so it was a bipartisan group, and at that point, we were just overwhelmed with these children. At that point, the Border Patrol stations and the border detention facilities, which were primarily built, frankly, for single adults and were never built for long-term detention, were overwhelmed with children. You had children sleeping side by side during COVID—none of them being tested for COVID, by the way—and they didn't have blankets. They had sheets, essentially, that are—you know, no real warmth or padding. They were sleeping on the ground with pads underneath them. The system just couldn't handle it.

Now, at this point, most of those children are out of the Border Patrol system, and they are into the HHS system. HHS is the Agency that is supposed to take care of these kids. They can only be in the Border Patrol custody for a short period of time. That was being violated. They were staying there much longer than they were supposed to under law, but there was no place else for them to go. So now there have been HHS facilities that have been built and opened, and these HHS facilities are taking care of these kids.

I will say that some of my colleagues would say: Well, this is great news. You know, we have fewer children in Border Patrol custody; that is good. But they are still in American Government custody; they just switched from Border Patrol to HHS.

HHS has had a very hard time staffing up, and there have been, as you know, allegations of abuse. Some of these contracts that have been given to the private sector to run these HHS facilities have not been done in a proper way, and it has caused problems.

A lot of the people who were down there on the border helping with these kids do not have the right training. They are not trained to take care of kids—including, by the way, a lot of government employees who have volunteered to go down. God bless them. They are getting paid to go down there rather than do their work here in Washington, as an example, but they don't have the training.

So this creates a lot of issues, as you can imagine, when you have thousands and thousands of these kids showing up in unprecedented numbers. So that is what we are seeing on the border because of changes in policy.

Another change in policy that was made was not only were we no longer going to turn people away because of COVID without putting anything in its place to deal with all these claims, but, instead, there was a policy called the "Remain in Mexico" policy or the Migrant Protocol policy. Under that policy, people who came as families and applied for asylum were told: Fine, but you have to wait in Mexico rather than wait in the United States for your asylum claim to be adjudicated.

Frankly, a lot of those people ended up going back home because they were

not brought into the United States, into the interior, as I said earlier, as the vast majority of people have been. They were instead told: You have got to wait in Mexico. They chose instead to go back to their home, mostly in Central America, rather than wait in Mexico. Those cases, once adjudicated, those people could come back and enter into our country if they were successful in their court case.

But this system is not working. If a trafficker or a smuggler goes to a family in Central America or elsewhere—there are a lot of immigrants now coming from other countries, including all over Latin America, Ecuador, and Nicaragua and other places. They say: Look, if you come with us, give me a lot of money as a trafficker, thousands of dollars, and if these kids come with me or you come with me as a family, we will get you into America, and you will have the opportunity to stay in America.

You know what, I have to say tonight on the floor of the U.S. Senate that those smugglers and traffickers are probably telling the truth, and that is the problem, because when they come to the border and they claim asylum, then instead of having that be adjudicated there at the border and determined—or saying: You need to wait on the other side of the border until we adjudicate this—what I would do on our side of the border, I would do the adjudications right there rapidly. Instead, they are saying: OK. Here is a bus pass or here is a plane ticket. Go to the interior of the United States. Go to your hometown, wherever it is, whoever is listening tonight—my hometown is Cincinnati, OH—go to Washington, DC, wherever, and then wait for your court case. You need to check in periodically.

Those court cases and the adjudications take years—on average, 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 years, depending on who you talk to. Because a lot of these cases are appealed, that is maybe where you get to the 7 or 8 years. So that is a long period of time, right, when you are in the United States awaiting your court case. Why? Because there is a backlog—a huge backlog—of over a million cases. I think it is more like 1.3 million now. So that huge backlog and the lack of resources that have been devoted to the system and the fact that just because you apply for asylum, you get to come into the United States gives the trafficker the ability to say that, to say: Just let your kids come with me or come with me as a family member. Pay me a lot of money.

Unfortunately, a lot of these individuals, including kids, women and girls, get abused on the trip north from mostly, again, the Northern Triangle countries—Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras up to Mexico. Obviously there are a lot of issues with crossing the border itself in terms of going across the desert, and there are some terrible stories.

But the point is, they know that when they get to the United States,

they are going to be told not that “You have to turn back,” not that “You have to stay here until we decide whether you actually are, you know, going to get asylum, whether you qualify for it,” but instead “Here is a bus ticket. Here is a plane ticket. Go into the interior and wait.”

Now, let’s say that individual who goes to the interior does not show up for the court case. What happens? Well, in theory, there is a group called ICE, which is part of the immigration system that then, having kept track of that person, deports the person back to their home country. That is not happening, or at least it is not happening in the vast majority of cases.

For a while, it was that the administration—and, frankly, the previous administration had a similar policy for at least some time—that we are going to focus on criminals. So those who are in the United States who are migrants coming up here who have a criminal record, we are going to deport them but not prioritize others who simply come here under an asylum claim and then do not show up at their court case or show up but do not leave the country.

But if you look at the deportation figures over the last several months of the Biden administration, you will see that that is just simply not happening. In fact, there were fewer deportations last month, I am told, than there are ICE agents. So I am not sure what they are doing.

But I do know that on this day, on the inaugural day, President Biden said to the world that we are going to stop deportations for a period of time. So that is added to this narrative that if you are a smuggler or a trafficker and one of these people who are taking advantage and exploiting these families and individuals and kids, you have got a narrative that is pretty strong where you can say: Hey, if you go to the border and you claim asylum, you come into the United States of America, and then we will see what happens. Unfortunately, right now we don’t have a system in place to deal with that.

So that is a long way of saying we have a crisis on the border, and we are not facing up to it.

In a number of the hearings that I have been at on this topic, the administration witnesses go out of their way to say this is the fault of the Trump administration. Their argument is, as I understand it, that the Trump administration should have been prepared for this surge by putting in place during this time period a lot more of this infrastructure.

We talked about the HHS facilities, for instance, that were not ready, and therefore kids got stuck at the Border Patrol detention facilities.

Well, it is an interesting argument. I mean, they didn’t have any issue here. They didn’t have this surge. They did back in 2019, but they put policies in place to deal with it. You can argue whether those policies were right or

not, but you can’t then say: OK. They should have had all this infrastructure in place.

My point is, we need to own up to our own actions, and to blame the Trump administration for what is happening now in terms of the lack of infrastructure when the infrastructure wasn’t needed, frankly, given the policies they had in place, I think is, frankly, just not a very constructive use of time. We should instead be focused on, OK, how do we take this situation and make it better and deal with it?

My own view, for what it is worth, is we start with enforcing the law, particularly along the border, and say to our Border Patrol: We are going to give you the support you need to be able to support keeping these drugs out and dealing with the immigration crisis in an appropriate way. Instead, we have done just the opposite.

So the first thing I would do is to say: Let’s support those who are on the border. Let’s tell them we are going to be there for them and provide them the resources they need to do their job. One of those things, of course, is to complete the fencing that was started during the Trump administration.

There are some in this body on the other side of the aisle and, of course, a lot in the Obama administration who did not support the wall; same with the new Trump administration—or, I am sorry, the new Biden administration. But the Trump administration decided to go ahead with the wall. They got the money for it. He started building it—not across the whole border but over about 20 percent of the border, which has often been misunderstood, but areas where it would make a difference, at least to slow people down.

I have always been of the view that the wall is not in and of itself an answer because if you don’t have technology associated with the wall, people will go under it or over it and around it. You have to have the cameras and the sensors and so on to make the wall effective. That has not been completed.

What has been completed is most of the fencing, but then there are gaps in the fencing. And when I was down there, as everyone can testify who has been down to the border to see this, there are literally holes in the wall where they were going to put a gate in, but they hadn’t completed it yet, and when the Biden administration came in, again, one of the things they did on day one, they said: Stop. Stop the construction—even though the contractors had already been paid to do this work.

So, literally, if you go to the El Paso sector, where I was, you go to an opening in the wall, there will be the construction material there on the ground, and there are no contractors there, and the Border Patrol, you can imagine, is demoralized by this. These people have already been paid to put up the gate, but they leave the gate open. So they have to be 24/7 physically present there to keep people from coming through those openings or just—which is what

they do because they don’t have the people to do it—just assume you are going to have a lot of crossings there when there is not Border Patrol there.

Instead, we should complete those very small sections of the wall that haven’t been completed, and, again, it is mostly openings.

Then we should put the technology in place. We were told when we were down in El Paso in that sector that only 10 percent of the technology had been put in place for, let’s say, you know, dozens of miles of wall—not thousands, not for even the area outside of the suburban and urban areas, but in the areas where it could slow people down to give the Border Patrol a chance to be able to respond. But the technology was stopped, again, on day one because President Biden said we are going to stop construction, stop—even though the contractors had been paid for this work.

So that, to me, is No. 1. Let’s give the Border Patrol what they need in terms of personnel and equipment and specifically the technology. I think the technology is the most important part of this. And you do need the sensors, you do need the cameras, and you do need to know what is going on.

If smugglers are coming through with a bunch of drugs and they can divert the Border Patrol, which they do, with another group—let’s say a group of unaccompanied children or families, where there is a lot of processing time involved—the Border Patrol will go to the one group, spend a lot of time processing, as they have to do, and in the meantime, the group coming with the drugs will sneak across. If you have the technology in place, you can avoid that, but if you don’t, there is no way to deal with that crisis.

So, No. 1, let’s take care of those along the border who are trying their best to do their work and don’t have the support that they need.

No. 2, I think we need to reinstate some asylum policies that were starting to work effectively. Frankly, they hadn’t been implemented fully during the Trump administration, so it is hard to tell. But one is allowing people who want to apply for asylum to apply in their home country or in a safe third country.

So think about this. I talked earlier—people who want to apply for asylum now are just coming to the border, and they are told, under an asylum claim, they can go into the interior of the United States. They are given maybe a notice to appear—actually, a lot of families are not even given a notice to appear anymore because they are just overwhelmed. We saw that, and I saw families who were literally given just a sheet of paper that had the addresses of where the ICE offices are in America, and they were told: We don’t know where you are going in America, but wherever you go, go to this ICE office wherever, in your region, but no notice to appear in court. But whether they are given a notice to appear or not, they are going into the interior.

Instead, what if those people applied—not taking that dangerous journey north through Mexico but instead applied in their home country or applied in a safe third country?

And there were safe third-country agreements with the countries in the region—for instance, Guatemala—which, as you know, those who are in Guatemala are coming from El Salvador or Honduras or farther south. That makes a lot of sense to me. Those are discontinued for some reason. They really hadn't been put in place where they were implemented fully, but that would seem to me to be a very smart thing; that is, to tell people: If you want to apply for asylum, that is fine. Come to our consulate office and apply, or if you don't want to apply in your own country, perhaps because you do fear persecution, go to a third country and stay in a third country and apply. Doesn't that make sense?

Also, I think we should—and again, these should all be bipartisan ideas—give the Border Patrol the resources that they need. On third-country asylum applications, I know for a while there were a number of Democrats who strongly supported applying for asylum in your own home country. President Obama's administration did for some time.

But, third, I would require adjudication at the border. So when you come for asylum—and this is consistent with legislation that is bipartisan that Senator SINEMA and Senator CORNYN introduced and I support—you have regional processing centers on the border. This will take some funds. It will be expensive because we don't have a system in place right now. As I said, there is a 1.2, 1.3 million backlog in asylum claims. That is when people have to wait 4, 5, 6, 7, years. Instead, have these on the border. Have these operations where somebody can come, claim asylum, and go before an immigration official, someone who can judge whether that asylum claim is credible or not.

A little background for this, if you come from these Northern Triangle countries or come from Mexico and claim asylum, only about 15 percent—that is 1-5, 15 percent—of these asylum claims are ultimately successful. Why? Because most people who are coming are coming for economic reasons, which I totally understand. If I were a father in Honduras in a rural area and I had no prospects for a job, I would want to gather up my family and come to the United States, because you can get a lot more financial security here for yourself and your family. That is totally understandable, but that is not the basis for an immigration system because, unfortunately, there are billions of people around the world in that kind of a situation. So it needs to be based on an orderly system where, yes, people can apply, as they do every day from Honduras and come through the legal immigration system, or if they have a credible fear, they can apply for asylum. But why not do it in these safe

third countries or, when you come up to the border, do it at the border?

Again, let's assume 15 percent in the end qualify. Those 15 percent would be able to come in as asylees, much as refugees come into this country. It is basically the same criteria. I am not against the refugee system. I think we should accept refugees in this country, as other countries do, who have a credible fear of persecution in their own country and need a place to land. We have a successful system to do that. We have a system to resettle these people. There are agencies that specialize in that. A lot of them are private sector agencies.

So I think on the border is where we ought to put the funding. These regional processing centers ought to be there to help make the decision quickly—quickly—so that people don't have to wait 4 years, but instead they get an answer, yes or no, to be able to come into this country if they apply for asylum and they qualify for asylum.

Finally, I would say that we need to put a system in place to discourage illegal immigration that goes to the employer. And I know this is somewhat controversial on both sides of the aisle for different reasons, but to me, if an employer can hire someone who is illegal, because that person has documentation—say, a driver's license or Social Security card or something else that is fraudulent—there will be more and more illegal immigration because that is the magnet.

I know some say that people come to this country to take advantage of our social services and not to work. There may be some of that, but I will tell you, if you go to the border and talk to these migrants—which I have done, and I did it again a couple of months ago and did it many times before—and ask them: Why are you coming to America? They are not saying they are coming to America to get on our social welfare system. They say they are coming to work because they know they can make 5 times, 10 times, maybe even from poor areas in Honduras 15 times what they can make in their own country. And they would like to bring their families and would like for them to have a better life and maybe send remittances back to their family. Well, again, that is an issue that we need to address in these third world countries, but in the meantime we need to have an orderly system of immigration, and if you allow employers to hire people without any consequence, then, this will continue to happen.

So what is the answer to that? Well, one is to have an E-Verify system that really works. That means you have to verify electronically whether someone is eligible to work in the United States. And the small business owner should not be the police officer. It should be easy to do. It should be a software system that enables them to find out immediately whether that Social Security card is fraudulent or not. That includes looking at the Social Se-

curity number online and deciding: Is this number connected to this person?

It also, I think, is going to have to require a photograph and looking at the photograph and determining whether the person is who the person says he or she is. But this can be done with the new technologies that we have. Right now we have E-Verify in place, but it is not mandatory. Don't you think it should be mandatory? Because if you dry up the job opportunities for people coming illegally, then you will not have this magnet of pulling people over the border.

Again, legal immigration ought to be encouraged. We ought to bring in refugees. Asylees who qualify ought to be given asylum in this country. That is who we are. We are a country that has always welcomed the stranger. But do it in an orderly and lawful way.

If we don't do that, we will continue to see a border being overwhelmed. We will continue to see this. There is no reason for this to change based upon current policy. These simple steps that I talk about could all be bipartisan. This is not a partisan issue. This is an issue of commonsense approaches that have been taken by Republican and Democrat administrations over the years. We can make a big difference here.

There is a small program called the Central American Minors Program, which was reinstated just this week, and it helps with regard to unaccompanied kids coming from Central America. I support that program. I am glad the Biden administration put it in place, and I have been told by Biden administration officials at the highest level at DHS that this is the answer. Well, we had something like 19,000 kids coming over the border in one month, and thousands a day. In that system in the Obama years, when it was in place, the Central American Minors Program only had 3,000 or 4,000 kids come through it over 10 weeks, or something like that. So we had more children coming over in 2 days than they did in that entire program.

I am not suggesting that the program is a bad idea. Let's do that. But if you don't do these other things, too, you are not going to make a dent in this issue.

And, again, our hearts go out to some of these individuals. They have a tough time in their countries, and we wish their countries were more like ours. We wish that they had more economic opportunities, more freedom, and that they had a democracy and a market system that actually works for the people. That is not the reality now.

I know the administration is focused on saying the answer to this question is dealing with the push-backers, dealing with, as Vice President KAMALA HARRIS said during her trip, the source of the problem, which is the poverty in Central America. Well, I will say, No. 1, there are migrants coming from all over the world, from Central America, of course—and that continues, and that

is a very poor part of our hemisphere—but also from many other countries, including Mexico, including people from Romania, from Yemen. I am just looking here—from Ecuador, from Colombia, from countries all over Latin America. So it is a big problem.

Again, there are billions of people in the world who unfortunately don't have the kind of lifestyle that we have in this country and aspire to it. So you have to have an immigration system of some kind.

Second, I would make the point that the administration is talking about spending \$4 billion in Central America. I suppose that is over the next few years. It should be noted that we just spent \$3.6 billion on economic development in those same countries over the past 5 years.

So I am for that. I think we should be helping these countries develop. I was for a trade agreement with these countries to try to encourage their economic development.

I am for helping to deal with the corruption and dealing with the kind of lack of transparency and lack of opportunity in these countries. That is all good. The judicial system and the rule of law need to be strengthened—no question about it. I am for doing that.

These countries are in our hemisphere. They should be treated, in my view, differently than even countries elsewhere in the world because they are close to us. They are our neighbors, essentially. But that is not going to solve the problem—certainly, not during my lifetime. It will take decades, and it doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. And we have been doing it. Some \$3.6 billion of hard-earned taxpayer money has gone toward this in the last 5 years.

But I don't think it is honest to tell the American people: If we just spend a little more money in Central America, this problem will be solved.

Wouldn't that be nice, if we could wave a magic wand and it could be solved and suddenly those countries would be prosperous and free?

It is going to take a long time. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't be doing it, but in the meantime we have to come up with a system that is lawful, that is orderly, that is humane, and that deals with this problem. And by putting our heads in the sand or blaming the previous administration—again, here is their record—that is not going to solve the problem. In fact, it is going to create an impression that the problem is easy to solve, which it is not. It is a difficult problem—no question about it. And broader immigration reform is something that is needed—no question about that.

But, in the meantime, let's focus on the border. Let's do these simple things. Let's support the Border Patrol. Let's be sure that they have what they need in terms of technology. Let's be sure that we are doing all we can to have asylees apply in their country, or, if not, in a third country. If they come

to our border, let's adjudicate those claims at the border, because then the next group will say: Well, I am not going to get to come into the United States and wait for 4 or 5 years and get embedded in the community. I am going to have to have my case decided at the border.

It is much more likely that those traffickers, those smugglers who are exploiting these people are not going to be able to say—again, with some credibility right now: Hey, you come with me. You pay me a lot of money. I will take you not just to the border, but you will get into America, and you will be able to have a life there because you won't be deported.

That is what they can say now. We want them instead to be saying: Well you are going to have to have your case adjudicated at the border, and you may be qualified.

Again, 15 percent have made it through, and those are people who should be taken care of, in my view, as asylees. But for those other individuals, they will know that it is much better to apply legally, to go through the system, and to have the opportunity to go through an orderly, legal process.

So I hope that the administration makes some of these changes quickly because I don't see this situation getting any better. In fact, in May it got worse, despite everyone saying from DHS, with whom I spoke: Don't worry. Things are getting better.

I don't see that. There is a looming date—I think it is the end of July—when title 42 will no longer apply to single individuals. Right now, title 42, which I talked about earlier, which is where, because of COVID, the United States government is turning people away at the border. Right now, this is happening with regard to single individuals. When title 42 ends, which it will at the end of what is the COVID-19 public health emergency, which expires soon, then what is going to happen?

Well, I can tell you, the Border Patrol is very, very nervous about that. That is one question they ask me repeatedly: What are we going to do when we can't use title 42 and when people know that, when they come into this country, they are not likely to get deported?

That is a short-term issue we have to deal with. Congress could extend title 42 for now. We still have a COVID issue, not just in this country. Thank goodness we are getting over it, but it is a much bigger issue, unfortunately, south of the border, in all of these countries we talked about, including some of these countries in South America that are having a serious issue right now with COVID. You could continue with it, in my view, as a public health emergency. But, in any case, let's not do this—get rid of, as an example, title 42 without preparing for it. Let's be sure there is in place something else, something better to be able

to deal with the obvious surge that we have seen.

So I appreciate the fact that this is a tough issue, and I know that some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle would probably prefer that we not get into these difficult issues because they are hard.

I do see that the Presiding Officer has now arrived, with whom I have worked quite a bit on this issue, and we have a specific piece of legislation that helps to deal with this issue, that helps to deal with the surge.

That legislation is bipartisan. It creates a strategic plan and a contingency fund for immediate needs at the border when there is a surge to deal with the DHS issue I talked about earlier when the Border Patrol just gets overwhelmed.

That is another part of what we ought to do, is to be honest about the problem and to deal with it. It is called the Border Response Resilience Act, and it enables the Department of Homeland Security to respond to the worst immigration crisis that we have had in at least 20 years. I would hope that—again, that is a bipartisan approach—that we could at least pass that and then take the other four steps that I talked about to ensure that we have an orderly system that actually works and to be sure we can retain the sovereignty of our border, keeping the list of drugs out, like synthetic opioids and like fentanyl, that are killing so many Americans, and that we have an orderly and lawful and humane immigration system.

With that, I yield back.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VOTE EXPLANATION

● Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, due to a family medical emergency, I was unable to attend today's votes on motion to invoke cloture and confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 148, Radhika Fox, of California, to be an Assistant