

something we should do again in this Congress.

But even though the President himself has deemed the pandemic over, bureaucrats are obsessed with keeping this charade going.

Enough is enough. We must be the barrier between the American people and tyranny because tyrannical orders, like the COVID lockdowns, are dangerous to every citizen in this country.

As we get to work this Congress, I hope all my colleagues will join me in recognizing the tough realities I have just laid out. We cannot continue to do this, and we can't do it again. We have to commit to defending freedom in every circumstance. We have to learn from our past mistakes.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, after a busy and productive time at home for several weeks, I am glad to be back in the Senate as we kick off the new year and a new Congress. After 2 years of Democrats controlling both Chambers, the House and Senate, the American people voted for a change in the midterm election. Voters sent a Republican majority to the House and opted for a divided government.

With a Republican House, Democrats, of course, will no longer be able to abuse the budget reconciliation process to circumvent the normal legislative process, which means the end to partisan spending bills. They will have no choice but to work for common ground and to move legislation through what we call regular order around here, which means by the rules.

While there is a lot we need to do in the coming months, one of our top priorities must be the humanitarian and security crisis at the southern border. This crisis has been raging since President Biden took office 2 years ago. Day after day, month after month, migrants have crossed the border in unprecedented numbers.

Over the years, we have seen migration surges at different times, but nothing like this. The scale and the immensity of this crisis are unprecedented.

Last month, U.S. Customs and Border Protection encountered more than 250,000 migrants at the southern border. That is the back door to my State, the State of Texas. A quarter of a million people in a single month—that is a new record and a shocking number.

To put that in perspective, Customs and Border Protection encountered more migrants in November and December last year than it did in all of 2017—more in 2 months, the last 2

months of last year, than it did in the entire year of 2017.

Those figures tell you a lot, but no words can accurately capture just how complex and challenging the situation at the border truly is. To understand what is happening on the ground, you need to show up. You need to see it firsthand, and you need to listen and learn from the experts and the people who are dealing with this day in and day out.

I have traveled to the border many, many times over the last few years, as this crisis has gotten worse. I have spoken with the law enforcement officials who have taken an oath to uphold and enforce our laws, the nonprofits—groups like Catholic Charities, which provide humanitarian services—local officials, mayors, and county judges, who are responsible to their own taxpayers for providing services that are overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of people coming across the border.

Then there are private landowners who find that their fences are knocked down, their properties are trashed, and that people trespass upon it at will.

Then there are the small business owners that depend on the foot traffic that frequently comes back and forth across the border and countless others who are impacted by the current border crisis.

Of course, these are exactly the kinds of people you might want to talk to if you actually had an interest in learning more about what the problem is and fashioning some kind of solution.

I was happy to introduce these experts to a bipartisan group of my Senate colleagues a couple of weeks ago. Both of us representing border States, Senator SINEMA, the Senator from Arizona, and I have had what you might call an exchange program between our two States.

A couple of years ago I visited Tucson, AZ, and Senator SINEMA, in turn, visited the Rio Grande Valley for a series of briefings. The first thing that jumps out at you is that the border is big—2000 miles. It covers a lot of territory, and it varies a lot, depending on whether you visit urban areas like El Paso or rural areas like Yuma, AZ.

That is why, while I am happy that President Biden finally went to the border in El Paso, briefly, I know he could not have gotten a full awareness of the challenges that the current crisis, as a result of his open border policies, presents.

Nevertheless, seeing two very different border crossings was valuable to both Senator SINEMA and myself, and we decided it was time to share that information with our colleagues. So we invited several of them to join us. In total, there were eight of us—eight Senators on the trip. On the Republican side, we had Senators TILLIS, LANKFORD, MORAN, and myself. On the Democratic side, we had Senators KELLY, MURPHY, and COONS.

Actually, now that Senator SINEMA has declared herself as an Independent,

she said that this was not a bipartisan trip but a tripartisan trip.

We spent a day in El Paso, speaking with law enforcement and local stakeholders. In recent months, the city of El Paso has been ground zero and overwhelmed by the influx of migrants. It doesn't have the capacity—no border community does—to care for the tens of thousands of people coming across the border daily or the infrastructure to house them or to transport them safely to other locations.

Fortunately, at least in the near term—and it tends to go in waves, up and down—most recently, the pace in El Paso has slowed down, but some of the sidewalks downtown are still lined with makeshift tents and sleeping bags—migrants camping out in the city, nowhere to go, waiting for their next meal and waiting for some place warm to be able to sleep.

We heard about the tremendous burden this crisis has placed on law enforcement at all levels. You can imagine it. They are already understaffed, and now they are overwhelmed.

We heard about the growing strain on the nongovernmental organizations and the cities, as they try to mitigate this crisis.

Again, this is a crisis of the President's own making, as a result of his open border policies and the failure to enforce our immigration laws.

We heard from business leaders who depend on customers coming to their business, as well as other local stakeholders, about the larger impact this crisis has had on the El Paso community and the southwest border region, especially the effect it has had on legitimate trade and travel, which are vital to the region's economy.

I don't know if most nonborder-State Senators understand it or not, but we have the largest land port in America in Laredo, TX. They have somewhere between 14 to 16,000 trucks a day come across the border for legitimate trade and commerce. Obviously, that legitimate trade and commerce that creates a lot of jobs all across America are impeded by this vast influx of humanity that are coming currently as a result of the nonenforcement policies of the administration.

The day after we visited El Paso, we traveled to Yuma, AZ. And, if you are looking at a map of Arizona, it is in the southwest portion of Arizona, just right next to California, at the very southern-southwest tip of Arizona.

Yuma, AZ, is an agricultural community, by and large—a small town, not a lot of infrastructure, not a lot of hospitals, schools, or other places for migrants to be taken care of when they come to the border. So it is no surprise that the Border Patrol there in Yuma, AZ, a little small town on the southwestern border of Arizona—the Border Patrol agents—are strained, security missions are taking a hit, and it has become even more challenging to process and care for the volume of migrants they see coming across the border.

Now, lest anybody think that illegal immigration is just related to Mexico and Central America, people fleeing poverty and violence, the acting Border Patrol chief in the Yuma sector told us that, in that sector alone, they encountered migrants speaking 200 languages, from 176 countries—this little sleepy town in southwest Arizona, people speaking 200 languages, from 176 countries.

Well, you might ask: How is that possible? Where are these people coming from? I thought they were all coming from Mexico or maybe even Central America.

Well, it just so happens that there is a major city just south of Yuma, AZ, in northern Mexico, called Mexicali, and what we are seeing is international human smuggling operations flying people into Mexicali and then turning up in Yuma and claiming asylum—again, overwhelming the capacity of this small little border town to be able to deal with these huge numbers—and people, frankly, abusing the asylum system, which is supposed to be people fleeing from persecution.

There are people with Gucci luggage coming across the border and claiming asylum, knowing that, because of the broken asylum process, they will be transported into the interior of the United States and given a notice to appear for a future court hearing. But because of the backlog of the immigration courts, it will be literally years before they are notified to show up.

If they do show up, 90 percent of them will be unsuccessful in obtaining asylum. But the fact is they don't, which should be a surprise to no one.

Well, as I said, I have learned a lot from the experts on the ground, and I hope our colleagues, our bipartisan delegation of Senators, did as well.

I appreciate the Senators who took the time to visit El Paso and Yuma, and I know all of us appreciate the men and women on the frontlines who took time out of their busy schedules, already overwhelmed by this humanitarian crisis and border security crisis. They took the time to talk to us, hoping—just hoping—that we might be able to do something to help them.

Now, eight Senators—it won't surprise you—have different views and ideas about how to solve the crisis. Standing together along the border doesn't mean we agree on everything, but it does mean that we are interested in finding solutions. There are conversations occurring in the House and the Senate, and Members from both sides of the aisle are floating a range of ideas to address the crisis.

There are some bipartisan conversations occurring, including Senator SINEMA from Arizona and Senator TILLIS from North Carolina, and I am glad they are working on this, and I am eager to see what they come up with.

As we all know, President Biden has shown that he is completely unwilling to use his current authorities to secure the border. And the truth is, he has

plenty of authorities but refuses to do his duty and enforce our laws.

So it is time for Congress to take action. Of course, that is something that is easier said than done—535 of us, 435 in the House and 100 in the Senate. It is not easy to get everybody—or at least a majority—on the same page, and we have the new reality of divided government, as I said earlier. But we do have within our capacity the ability to try and to achieve consensus and the art of the possible.

I know it is going to be a huge reach, a steep hill—pick your metaphor. It is going to be hard because the Democratic majority in the Senate has a very different approach than a Republican majority in the House. But we have to be realistic about what can pass the House and earn 60 votes in the Senate. A bill that will pass only one Chamber won't accomplish anything in dealing with this crisis.

Of course, at this moment, the border crisis is consuming all the oxygen in the room, but this must be addressed before we will be able to come to an agreement on any other immigration reforms. It is a prerequisite, a foundation, for any larger agreement. The million-dollar question is, What will that look like?

As my colleagues and I saw a couple of weeks ago, one of the biggest challenges is processing and holding capacity. This is a feature of the current catch-and-release policies of the Biden administration. It is not a bug. It is a feature of their catch-and-release policies, and it is being exploited daily by the criminal organizations that continue to get rich smuggling people and drugs across the border.

Our system simply was not designed to keep up with the influx of this many people crossing the border every day. As a result, Border Patrol agents told us that they are being shifted from the frontlines to process people in the back office, leaving huge security gaps—fully 40 percent, in some instances, of the border left unprotected because the Border Patrol has to process the migrants, and they have to leave the frontlines to do so, which means that the drug smugglers have an opening, which they exploit on a regular basis, to move illegal drugs into the United States.

Cartels are using these corridors to traffic fentanyl and other dangerous drugs into the country—the drugs that took the lives of 108,000 Americans last year alone. One hundred eight thousand Americans died due to drug overdoses from drugs almost entirely coming across the southwestern border.

You wonder what it will take to get people's attention, to wake up to this public health hazard, this public safety hazard, this humanitarian and national security crisis.

At the same time, migrants with weak and even frivolous asylum claims are being released into the country to await a court date that is years down

the line. As I said, many are no-shows, having successfully made it into the United States without any legal right to immigrate. That has got to change.

We also need to strengthen border security, which I would define, again, based on learning from Border Patrol and other experts along the border—border security requires a combination of personnel, technology, and infrastructure. That includes appropriately located barriers, fences, levees. It includes sensors, cameras, roadways, and more agents to prevent dangerous people and dangerous substances from entering our country. A safe and secure border relies on all of these elements.

It is clear that Congress needs to invest in more resources, but more than that, in correct policies so that immigration across our border will be safe, orderly, humane, and legal.

This movement of masses of humanity—250,000 a month—handled by the human smugglers and by the cartels who are getting rich—this is not good for anybody. It is not good for the migrants, who are viewed as a mere commodity—many of whom are left to die. Many young girls and women are sexually assaulted en route because these cartels don't view them as human beings; they view them as a commodity, something they can trade for money.

Well, there are a range of other reforms that I am looking at as we try to find our way toward a solution. I am open to hearing from anyone who has an idea, and I hope we can have a serious debate and solutions here in Congress.

What the President saw in El Paso was a snapshot of a sanitized border. I have no illusions that he has any depth of understanding about the complexity of what we are dealing with there, but I am glad he finally showed up after 2 years.

Given a Republican majority in the House and a Democratic majority in the Senate, we need to be realistic about what it is we might be able to accomplish. But, again, this is all about what somebody has called the art of the possible. That is what legislating is all about. But the fact is, there is an unprecedented humanitarian and security crisis at the southern border, and it is past time for Congress to do something to address it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

TENNESSEE

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, it was so wonderful to have time this month to kick off my annual 95-county tour, which is what I do in Tennessee each year. And I know that my colleagues across the aisle think they are here starting fresh with a new Congress, but that is not the way the people in Tennessee see this. As I have talked with people in our State, they continue to talk about what has happened this past couple of years with inflation, with crime, with that open border, with the supply chain issues. They