

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

are worried about that. They are worried about how that is going to affect them this year. My colleague from Texas has touched on some of these issues.

Now, in Tennessee, as they look at what has transpired over the last couple of years, we talked a lot about a tornado in December that ripped through Dresden, TN. I went into the Presbyterian church that was demolished on my last visit over there, and I saw the progress they are making to rebuild that wonderful church. One of the things they talked about was how inflation and supply chain bottlenecks are really thwarting their efforts to get this sanctuary finished so they can have their Easter celebration right there in that sanctuary.

In Waverly, TN, those individuals know exactly how the people over in Dresden feel because we had floods that came through Humphreys County, TN—devastating floods. There were 20 Tennesseans who lost their lives when the floods ripped through that town, destroyed that town, about a year and a half ago, and the town is trying to rebuild.

My team and I were able to help those folks there in Waverly secure a disaster declaration and the funds they needed to help get rebuilding, but the same issues—inflation and supply chains—those things that are hurting Dresden are hurting Waverly as they try to rebuild homes and as they try to recover.

Now, this President, this administration, and my Democratic colleagues have focused on big spending and little else, and it has really created a minefield for our local leaders, whether they are trying to rebuild or whether they are trying to expand. But those issues—supply chains and inflation—continue to come up.

West Tennessee, where I started my 95-county tour, is experiencing massive growth. Ford Motor Company is coming in there, and they have a big plant, a multibillion-dollar investment. Sonova is over in that part of the State. There are other companies that are moving their operations to the area. These communities are set to welcome thousands of jobs, homes, and new businesses, but they are not ready because the existing utility infrastructure cannot support the growth and expansion that are coming into that part of our State.

Until recently, most of this West Tennessee area was fields and small rural communities. These local leaders now are seeing growth, and they need to expand their utilities, their water, their sewer, their electric power distribution, and their telecom services, and they are having to do it quickly as these major employers ramp up. But something is standing in their way, and, again, it is all of this government spending that has driven this inflation and the supply chain crisis that is slowing down what they need. They can't get pipe to build out water and

wastewater systems. They can't get telephone poles. If they could find a transformer to buy, they wouldn't be able to afford it because the price has increased by more than 400 percent—400 percent—since Joe Biden was sworn into office.

I know that the Biden administration has an agenda, and they are willing to do whatever it takes to check these items off of their to-do list. They do have an agenda. It is all about government control. It is all about government spending. It is not the agenda the people have.

The way people in these communities in Tennessee see it is there is a disregard for how this Federal policy, as it comes down, how it affects them and how it makes their future difficult. It should not be this difficult to rebuild a home or run a sewer line or to finish a new road. Tennesseans know this, and they trust me, when I meet with them, to bring that message back here to DC, that decisions that are made here make their life at the local level more difficult.

BORDER CODEL

Madam President, over the past few years, we have seen proof that until President Biden and his administration secure the southern border, every town is a border town and every State is a border State. My colleague from Texas spoke so well about this issue and the impact that an open border is having on our communities.

Tennesseans are suffering because of the open border agenda, particularly when it comes to the disastrous consequences of the cross-border drug trade.

Tennessee law enforcement officials are working overtime to take down the cartel kingpins who have set up shop in our State, just like they have set up shop in so many of our States. But drug overdoses continue to destroy families, they destroy lives and careers, and the Biden administration continues to look the other way.

This month, I had the opportunity to see just how bad the situation has gotten right down on that southern border. Senators HYDE-SMITH and BRITT were kind enough to join me as we went to Eagle Pass, TX, where we witnessed firsthand the chaos that this administration's open border policies have created.

As most of my colleagues know, the situation in Texas became so dire that the Texas officials decided to take matters into their own hands. In 2022, Operation Lone Star helped law enforcement apprehend more than 336,000 illegal immigrants. That is just in Texas. They arrested more than 23,000 criminals—criminal illegal aliens, 23,000—just in Texas, and they seized 354 million doses of fentanyl—354 million doses.

Now, these numbers are appalling. When you hear them stand-alone, they are appalling. When you talk to the Border Patrol and you realize that this is Texas, that this doesn't account for

the other States, that this doesn't account for what is going on as every State becomes a border State and every town becomes a border town—when you hear these numbers, one would think common sense would tell you this Chamber should get busy saying: How do we secure that southern border? But that hasn't happened, and the cost of negligence is more crime and more death and more American citizens losing their lives and the cartels making more money. Yes, indeed, the cartels are running that border. You do not cross. Nothing crosses without paying the cartels.

Now, we visited several locations in the Del Rio sector that are experiencing significant migrant traffic along the river. At every location, we found clothing, IDs, medication, and other personal items that the migrants dropped as they entered the country. What happened to those individuals is anyone's guess, because many of them don't want to be found out who they really are.

Many of them are convicted criminal aliens. Many of them come from countries where they would be sent back, so they create a new identity once they touch U.S. soil. Then they can be here because we have catch-and-release, because we do not have "Remain in Mexico," because we do not have what the Border Patrol has been telling us for 30 years they need—a physical barrier and a better technology where they cannot have a physical barrier.

In Eagle Pass we were able to witness firsthand two separate migrant groups crossing the river. One of those groups included a pregnant woman and several children. The other included children and an elderly woman who was clearly struggling to keep her footing while she was coming across that river. With this dangerous situation, with those freezing waters, the Texas National Guard troops could only watch and just hope that no one drowned.

Now, that is what we saw in the early morning hours. But what we know is, during the night there were 57 other groups that crossed—a lot of them single adults. We know that the cartels, which are multi-billion dollar, multinational organizations, work globally, and they are bringing in hundreds of millions of dollars a week. And they have brought along people from 150 different countries who are going to the cartel to come into the country because they think it is faster to do it that way.

Or maybe they want to be the "got-aways," people we see on surveillance who are known "got-aways" or the unknown "got-aways," which are what the really bad ones are. They are going to completely different areas in crossing to bring in drugs, to bring in sex traffickers, to bring in human traffickers, to put people into modern-day slavery. There were 57 more known crossings—known—that we did not see.

Border agents told us that the day before our tour, there were 1,000 arrests