

the month of October. The past 24 hours alone saw a record-breaking 12,000-plus migrant encounters at the southern border and, I would say, the highest—highest—daily total ever recorded. And those numbers don't count the "got-aways," the individuals the Border Patrol saw but was unable to apprehend.

Let's be very clear: While many of these individuals may simply have headed to the United States in search of a better life, there is no question that there are dangerous individuals who are trying to make their way into our country.

During fiscal year 2023, the Border Patrol arrested 169 individuals on the Terrorist Watchlist at the southern border—169. That was a substantial increase over fiscal year 2022, which was itself a substantial increase over fiscal year 2021. Needless to say, that is not a good trajectory. Again, these numbers only refer to individuals the Border Patrol has actually apprehended. There were 670,000 known "got-aways" during fiscal year 2023.

How many of them were terrorists, criminals, or other dangerous individuals?

Well, the answer is, we really don't know. We really don't know.

One thing we do know is that the chaotic southern border and the chaos that we have experienced there cannot continue. Our country cannot be secure while we have 10,000 people a day pouring across our southern border and hundreds of thousands of unknown individuals taking up residence in our country. Think about it. With the record that we had yesterday—as I mentioned, well over 12,000, which is the single highest—single highest—day that we have ever had on record in terms of people being apprehended illegally at the southern border, if you analyze that number, you are talking about more than 4.5 million people a year—4.5 million a year. That is way more people than the majority of the States in this country, in the entire United States of America.

The Federal Government is charged with the responsibility for our Nation's security, and we owe the American people nothing less than a secure border. So while I believe it is essential that we get aid to our allies, any supplemental must include measures to address our national security here at home at the border as well as our national security interests abroad.

I want to thank Senator LANKFORD for his patience and tenacity in working to bring Democrats to the table. After weeks of Democrat intransigence, it is encouraging that the White House is finally—and I say "finally" because, as I said, we had a proposal on the table at the beginning of November, and the White House finally engaged last Tuesday—finally has stepped up to take on a role in the negotiations. It is just too bad that they didn't do it weeks ago.

But I hope that the President and Democrats understand that the only

acceptable outcome of negotiations is a solution that meets the challenge at our southern border. Cosmetic measures and superficial tweaks are not going to cut it. So the ball is in the Democrats' court.

We need to get aid to allies like Ukraine, but we cannot pass legislation to do that without addressing the situation at our southern border. I would like to think that Democrats would see the necessity of addressing our border crisis irrespective of what is needed to get this bill through Congress, but at the very least, I hope that Democrats' concern for our national security interests abroad will lead them to finally—and again I say "finally"—get serious about working with Republicans to address the national security crisis here at home.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following Senators be permitted to speak prior to the scheduled recess for 5 minutes: Senator MURRAY for 5 minutes, Senator COLLINS for 5 minutes, and me for 5 minutes.

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

ISRAEL

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, it has now been over 70 days—70 days—since hundreds of people were kidnapped by Hamas. In that time, more than 100 have been released, including 4 Americans, but 8 Americans remain in captivity. And from what we have heard from those who have been released and rescued, it is likely they are enduring unimaginable suffering.

One of the released Americans, 4-year-old Abigail Mor Edan, was kept with four other hostages in above-ground apartments. She shared—shared—one piece of pita bread per day with four others and did not have a shower in the entire 50 days in captivity. Her hair was cut because it was filled with lice.

We have heard from others that they were kept in complete darkness for days. Some became psychotic and experienced hallucinations. A child was given ketamine for weeks, while others were given sedatives like Valium. We have heard reports of self-harm among the hostages, while some who have returned have suicidal ideations.

Many were subjected to psychological torture. A 12-year-old boy was forced to watch videos of the October 7 attack and threatened with a gun when he cried. I have seen those videos. You cannot unsee them once you have seen them. I cannot imagine the nightmares that will plague that boy for the rest of his life.

One man was told his wife was dead when she actually was alive. Others were convinced Israel no longer existed. A doctor who was treating hostages says that they were told that "nobody cares about you. You are here alone. You hear the bombs falling?"

They don't care about you. We're [the ones] here to protect you."

Most children lost between 10 to 15 percent of their body weight. These kids were starved. They had skin rashes and infections from being held in unsanitary conditions. Other children were branded—literally branded—with a motorcycle exhaust pipe to help identify them if they escaped.

Many came back speaking only in a whisper because they were warned not to make any noises in captivity. Many hostages were deprived of medicine and proper medical care. One woman who was shot in the hand says a veterinarian performed surgery on her. Others were beaten with electric cables.

Now, as the fighting in Gaza intensifies, the lives of hostages remain in jeopardy. I can't imagine what it must be like to live on only a piece of a pita a day for months. I can't imagine what it would be like to endure constant physical, psychological, and emotional torture for 70 days.

We know that at least one American hostage, Hersh Goldberg-Polin, had his lower arm blown off by a hand grenade. His mother says his injury could have easily resulted in him bleeding to death.

The treatment of these hostages are crimes against humanity. They are war crimes. And for those who remain in captivity, we are running out of time. We cannot give up hope. We cannot abandon them. We must go to the ends of the Earth to bring them back. These are American hostages, hostages from our ally Israel. We cannot stand quiet while they suffer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

I-5 BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor today, thrilled to announce major progress on something that I have been working on since my earliest days here in the U.S. Senate: replacing the I-5 bridge between Vancouver, WA, and Portland, OR.

Late last week, the administration began the notification and review process for grants from the brand new Mega Grant Program we all worked together to establish in the bipartisan infrastructure law, and I was proud to help write the provisions that made sure the Mega Program was funded when we passed that law. So I am ecstatic that the I-5 Bridge Replacement Project will be receiving \$600 million in Federal funding from the Mega Grant Program to move us forward on a project that is hugely important to Washington State, to the Pacific Northwest, and really the entire country.

This has been a long time coming, and I should know because I have been there for just about every step of this journey. I remember meeting with Senator Hatfield from Oregon when I was first elected to talk about the need to replace the I-5 crossing between our States—Washington and Oregon—which was already in bad condition in

the 1990s. We sat down with folks to hold one of the first of many, many, many conversations about what needed to be done and how we could make it happen.

Then, in 2003, as the top Democrat on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, I held a hearing in Vancouver to discuss why this project was so important. Back then, I was raising the alarm about predictions that peak congestion for traffic would hit 10 hours by 2020. And wouldn't you know it, today, we are dealing with 7 to 10 hours of slow-moving traffic during the morning and evening rush hours.

Ever since I held that field hearing 20 years ago, I have continued to champion this project at every possible opportunity and every juncture over the years—from securing tens of millions of dollars in Federal funding for the early stages of this project back when it was known as the Columbia River Crossing to sitting down with stakeholders and community leaders dozens of times and holding countless conversations on the thorny issues of moving ahead with a massive project like this, to passing a new provision into law to ease the FTA's evaluation process for multimodal projects and make the I-5 Bridge Replacement Project more competitive for Federal funding, and of course pressing hard to keep this dream alive when previous efforts fell apart. It has not been easy.

As anyone who has been involved in this process over the years knows, there have been no shortage of challenges and setbacks. And, make no mistake, we still have a lot more work to do to see this project through, but failing to replace the I-5 bridge has never been an option to me because I know how important this is to Southwest Washington and, really, to the entire region.

Let me just spell out the stakes for everyone here because too often we take our infrastructure for granted and ignore it until it completely fails. In just about every conversation I have had about the I-5 replacement project over the years, I have been clear we cannot afford to forget about this because, if we keep kicking the can down the road, one of these days, that entire bridge will collapse.

I am not about to sit back and let that happen. We are talking about infrastructure that dates back to World War I. We have over 130,000 cars a weekday and nearly \$100 billion of goods a year driving bumper to bumper across an antique that is at serious risk of collapse in the event of an earthquake, which is not exactly unheard of in our region. That is a recipe for disaster. It is frightening for everyone who has to drive across that bridge every day, and it is a huge economic liability for the businesses and communities who rely on the goods that are trucked over it.

And beyond the risk of collapse in the future, there are losses caused by

traffic we are seeing today, which is hampering billions of dollars in trade and commerce and stealing one of people's most precious and irreplaceable resources: their time. It is wasting hours of their lives every day, making them late for work, making them get home late, and keeping them away from their family and friends and loved ones.

Replacing this bridge that is overcrowded, over 100 years old, and underprepared for an earthquake should be a no-brainer, especially since this project also includes vital transit and roadway improvements like extending the light rail from Portland, OR, to Vancouver, WA, and making the crossing safer and more accessible for cyclists and pedestrians.

As everyone who has been involved in this discussion knows, Mega funding is critical to building out those key components of the project. This is a great and important reminder for all of my colleagues. Good things happen when we all roll up our sleeves and work together to make good bipartisan legislation a reality.

So a special thank-you especially to the 10 bipartisan Senators whose resolve and determination to work together and hammer out the details of the legislation made the bipartisan infrastructure law a reality.

Now, the importance and urgency of this project should be obvious. Unfortunately, as someone who has had to make this argument over and over again, I can tell you it has not always been the case. Much like the citizens on the I-5, this bridge replacement project has been stuck in gridlock way too long. I have been pushing hard for years to keep this moving forward, and with this announcement, we are now making big progress.

So I really was delighted to announce this major progress toward securing funding which I have worked on for so long, along with my amazing partners like Vancouver Mayor Anne McEnerny-Ogle, State Senator Annette Cleveland, Secretary Roger Millar at the Washington State Department of Transportation, Greg Johnson and his incredible staff, all of our Southwest Washington labor allies, and so many others who joined me in this effort over so many years. This Mega grant will be an important mile marker and a sign that we are finally picking up speed.

Now, I am determined to secure the additional Federal funding we will need to get this done, but this announcement is bringing a goal we have been working on together for decades—replacing the I-5 crossing—closer into view, and that is a big deal. I am as ready as I have ever been to keep moving forward and finish the job.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

BORDER SECURITY

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, our colleagues are aware that there is a group of Senators who are meeting with the

administration officials to try to carefully craft an urgently needed solution to the border security crisis. I rise today to discuss the urgent need for bipartisan solutions to address that crisis.

Yesterday set a new record that demonstrates the magnitude of our border security crisis. U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers encountered a record 12,381 foreign nationals who were entering the United States along our southwest border without authorization.

So far this fiscal year, we are averaging nearly 8,500 encounters per day, and, this month, the average is nearly 10,000 per day. That means that for the month of December, we are likely to reach a record of more than 300,000 people crossing the southwest border without legal authorization. At the current rate, we are on pace for more than 3 million encounters in fiscal year 2024, which would shatter the previous high set last fiscal year.

To put this in perspective, that is more than twice as many encounters at the southwest border as there are people in the entire State of Maine, and these enormous numbers do not include what Border Patrol agents describe as the "got-aways"—in other words, those who do not turn themselves in and, instead, elude capture.

These numbers have grown dramatically in the past 3 years. Since fiscal year 2021, we have seen almost 6.6 million encounters and are on pace to see nearly 9.7 million individuals by the end of fiscal year 2024. Jeh Johnson, who served as Secretary of Homeland Security under President Obama, once said that, when he was Secretary, a thousand migrant encounters a day overwhelms the system. So just think what 10,000 individuals crossing does to the system.

And this problem is not limited to the southwest border, even though that is where the problem is most acute. We are increasingly seeing surges of migrant encounters along our northern border, including the State of Maine. According to Customs and Border Protection, migrant encounters at the northern border increased 73 percent in fiscal year 2023 over the previous year and a staggering 700 percent over fiscal year 2021 levels.

In the State of Maine, encounters have increased over 450 percent since fiscal year 2021. Increasingly, what we are seeing is that migrants are flying to Canada, knowing that they will have an easier time crossing the enormous 5,525-mile northern border.

Just recently, the U.S. Border Patrol encountered a group of 20 Romanians illegally crossing into the United States near Houlton, ME, in northern Maine. Two of these individuals were flagged as "transnational criminal organized crime" matches and detained for expedited removal proceedings. The remaining 18 were simply released into the local community.