

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.

Communities in Maine and throughout our country are struggling to absorb this influx of people who are being released into the interior. The majority of migrants are released pending an adjudication of their asylum claims. But that is a process that can take years.

In Portland, ME, a city of 68,000 residents, more than 1,600 asylum seekers have arrived since January.

Sanford, ME, which has a population of only 22,000, has had approximately 400 migrants arrive since May. Over the past 6 months, the city of Sanford has spent \$1.3 million to provide food, housing, and other required assistance to asylum seekers and their families.

Now, the irony here is these asylum seekers are not allowed to go to work immediately upon filing their asylum applications. I have introduced a bill that could help lessen the impact on local communities by helping asylum seekers support themselves, as they want to do. And employers in Maine want to hire them while they await their immigration proceedings.

Specifically, my bill would shorten the waiting period for asylum seekers who come through legal ports of entry to apply for employment authorization, provided that their applications are not frivolous, that they are not detained, and that their identities have been verified with their names run through the Federal Government's Terrorist Watchlist.

An out-of-control border, which is what we have now, poses a very real threat to our homeland and our people. This is a national security challenge for our country.

Since fiscal year 2021, 294 individuals who were apprehended by Border Patrol at the southwest border were on the Terrorist Watchlist. That compares to only 11 such individuals in the previous 4 years combined. And just think how many others are part of the "got-aways," those who did not turn themselves in or were not apprehended by our Border Patrol.

There are also tens of thousands of migrants arrested at our southern and northern borders who have criminal convictions or who are wanted by law enforcement, such as the two Romanians recently encountered in Maine.

Not only has the failure to control our border led to unchecked migration, but it has also contributed to the serious illegal drug crisis that is affecting communities throughout our country.

Mexican drug cartels are using the chaos at the southern border to facilitate their trafficking operations. They are sending record amounts of fentanyl into this country, enough to kill every American many times over.

Maine, like so many States, has seen record increases in recent years in the number of overdose deaths, nearly 80 percent of which are fentanyl related. We lost 513 Mainers in the first 10 months of 2023 to fatal overdoses, and 373 of these deaths were fentanyl related.

In addition, the Mexican cartel used the chaos and the uncontrolled southern border for human trafficking.

This is a crisis. It is a humanitarian crisis, and it is a national security crisis. And we cannot allow it to continue.

I have long supported creating legal immigration pathways with appropriate guardrails. Immigrants contribute to our great country and our communities in so many important ways. However, it is clear that we must act to address the ongoing and ever worsening crisis at our borders, which adversely affects communities throughout our country.

We cannot delay any longer. I am a strong supporter for continuing to provide assistance to Ukraine to repel Russian aggression. Make no mistake about it, Putin will not stop with Ukraine. He will go on to re-create, if he possibly can, his vision of, once again, having the old Soviet Union. I believe that if he is successful in Ukraine, he will next seize Moldova. He then will begin to menace and threaten our NATO allies—the Baltic States, Poland.

So far, we have been able to assist Ukraine without one American soldier losing his life or her life. We should continue to do so.

We need to help our greatest ally, Israel, in its fight against the terrorist group Hamas.

These, in many ways, are border disputes as well, but we cannot ignore the border crisis that we have in our own country. And that is why we need to work on all of these issues and bring them together in a supplemental funding bill.

The time to act is now. It is unfortunate that the administration has been so late to these negotiations, but I still have hope that we can put together a package that will address all of these crises: the border crisis in our own country, the border crisis in Ukraine, the border crisis in Israel with the terrorist attacks from Hamas, and the coming border crisis that we are going to see, I fear, with China increasingly threatening Taiwan. All of those issues need to be addressed in the supplemental. Let's get the job done.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:58 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. LUJÁN).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 430, Christopher Charles Fonzzone, of Pennsylvania, to be an Assistant Attorney General.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard J. Durbin, Tina Smith, Benjamin L. Cardin, Alex Padilla, Richard Blumenthal, Christopher A. Coons, Mazie Hirono, Chris Van Hollen, Michael F. Bennet, Mark Kelly, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Tim Kaine, Patty Murray, Angus S. King, Jr., Jack Reed, Cory A. Booker.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Christopher Charles Fonzzone, of Pennsylvania, to be an Assistant Attorney General, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mr. PADILLA) and the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. SCHATZ) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. BARRASSO), the Senator from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN), the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN), the Senator from Indiana (Mr. BRAUN), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BUDD), the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. CASSIDY), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CORNYN), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CRAMER), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), and the Senator from Montana (Mr. DAINES).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BUDD) would have voted "nay."

The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Iowa (Ms. ERNST), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY), the Senator from Missouri (Mr. HAWLEY), the Senator from Mississippi (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH), the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON), the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE), the Senator from Wyoming (Ms. LUMMIS), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MARSHALL), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), and the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. MULLIN).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MARSHALL) would have voted "nay."

The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), the Senator from Utah (Mr. ROMNEY), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), the Senator from Missouri (Mr. SCHMITT), the Senator from Florida (Mr. SCOTT), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr.