

causes” of this crisis, are they going to fix the world? You can see why their misconception, their misunderstanding, their erroneous narrative of what the problem is doesn’t help solve the problem.

It is time for the Biden administration to acknowledge the reality of the situation and look at solutions that are realistic and effective. In order to get this crisis under control, we have to move quickly on a bipartisan basis to insist on the enforcement of our immigration laws when people attempt to enter our country other than through legal means. That is the only viable path forward, and the sooner the administration understands that, the better off we will all be.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). The Senator from Nebraska.

#### BORDER SECURITY

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I would thank my colleague, the senior Senator from Texas, for his comments and his perspective and his insight, as a Senator serving from a border State, on what they are facing every single day. I would say to my colleague that Nebraska has become a border State. I know Colorado has become a border State. Every State in this country now is feeling the effects of the chaos that we see at our southern border, so my thanks to the senior Senator from Texas for offering his perspective on that.

I would say that on January 13 in Nebraska, we had two Nebraska State Patrol officers who pulled over two separate vehicles that were hours away from each other. One car contained 50,000 suspected fentanyl pills. The other contained a suspected fentanyl-cocaine mixture. Both cars were driven up from the border. These are only the latest instances of synthetic opioid trafficking in my State of Nebraska. In 2022, the Nebraska State Patrol confiscated 66 pounds of fentanyl, and that is up from 25 pounds the year before and 10 pounds in 2020.

In Nebraska and throughout this Nation, the numbers of drug seizures are staggering. At the southwest border, there was a 55-percent increase in fentanyl seizures from just November to December. Heroin seizures increased by 52 percent the month before. Methamphetamine seizures increased as well.

We know what is driving these drug trafficking numbers: We have a crisis at our southern border. The effects of that crisis are rippling across the country, felt by communities in Nebraska and beyond.

When we cannot control who is entering the United States, what they are bringing in, or where they are going, that is a serious national security risk.

Let’s go over the numbers. Customs and Border Protection encountered 2.3 million migrants at the southern bor-

der this past fiscal year—more encounters than any other year in our history. Migrant encounters in December reached the highest monthly level ever recorded, with over 250,000 encounters in 1 month. That number had tripled in just 2 years. And it gets even worse. Border Patrol agents have stopped individuals on the government’s terror watch list 38 times so far since October. Suspected terrorist encounters will hit record levels if this trend continues through 2023. Gang-affiliated encounters skyrocketed last year as well, from 348 to 751.

These historic statistics should concern anyone who cares about our country’s security and the safety of our communities and the safety of American families. But this administration doesn’t consider what is going on at the border to be a crisis. In fact, our President hardly seems to consider what is going on at the border at all. Despite his recent trip south for what I thought was a photo op, his administration has exacerbated the border crisis.

In case anybody has forgotten, let me refresh your memories. With simple strokes of his pen, President Biden ended the national emergency declaration at the border. He halted construction on the border wall, and he scaled back ICE enforcement in the first few months of his Presidency.

No amount of photo ops can change what we all know: This administration has not only failed to prioritize the safety and security of our border, it has put forward policies over the past 2 years that have worsened this crisis.

Only a month ago, President Biden himself insisted that “there are more important things going on.” I happen to think the national security threat posed by an influx of suspected terrorists across the border is important. I think that human trafficking overrunning our border is important. I think the massive increase in overdoses due to drug smuggling across the border is important. Across the country, fentanyl is now the leading cause of death for Americans ages 18 to 49. Between 2019 and 2021, Nebraska’s largest county saw an appalling 400-percent increase in fentanyl overdose deaths.

Complacency is not an acceptable response to this atrocious uptick in loss of life. My Republican colleagues and I have real, commonsense solutions to the problems that our border is facing. We need to invest more in new border security measures and resources for the men and women who serve us honorably as Border Patrol agents. We need to end the lenient policies like catch-and-release and increase penalties for people who don’t show up for their immigration court hearings. We need the Department of Homeland Security to create a serious, comprehensive strategy to address those issues.

Simply throwing more tax dollars toward a smartphone app that offers migrants appointments to cross our bor-

der—well, that is what the Biden administration has proposed. It is not the right response to the mayhem we are seeing. Their policies do nothing to secure the border and to reinforce our Nation’s security.

Until President Biden and my Democratic colleagues seriously work with us to fix this border chaos once and for all, we can expect to see more drugs brought into our country, more women and children facing a life of sex trafficking, and more threats to the security of our Nation.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### BORDER SECURITY

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, I rise today at the beginning of this new year to talk about a problem we have talked about a lot, but unfortunately we haven’t gotten the results we need, and that is to talk about our southern border.

It is not a new topic for me—I have been on the floor many times talking about this, as have my colleagues—and it is not a new topic for the American people because they see this every day, and many people are living it very close-up. Many of my colleagues can say the same because this is a topic they have unfortunately had to discuss over and over and over again, with no real results, and we are going to hear from some of them today.

Years ago on this Senate floor, I said:

I urge my colleagues here in the Senate to take a long—hard look at the undisputed facts that demonstrate the crisis at the border is escalating.

When I said those words, it was December 2018. The number of apprehensions along the southern border then was a little more than 60,000. Over the weekend, Customs and Border Protection released the numbers for this past December, and apprehensions along our southern border were reported at 251,487—an alltime high.

You can see from the chart I have here—you might not be able to read the numbers, but the dark blue is what we have been doing all through 2022, far eclipsing the light blue of 2021, which

were record numbers. But, here again, in the dark purple, which is the lower one, this is the average from fiscal year 2013 to 2020, and many times, this is five times, six times the amount in December. That is startling—startling.

But one thing that has changed over these last 2 years, fortunately, is that the President finally decided to visit the southern border. He went to El Paso several weeks ago. Well, it is about time. It certainly shouldn't have taken that long to visit a part of our country that is deeply affected by these numbers, but he finally went down.

I have been to the southern border many times. I am sure, Madam President, you have been there many times as well—quite a bit over the years. We just had several codels go down these past couple weeks.

The President has been saying of Republicans that “it is easy to demagogue the issue and reject solutions.” So here is what I have to say to the President in response to that: No, Mr. President, it is not easy to demagogue. It is easy to see that the issue is not getting the attention that it deserves by this administration.

The chart pretty much says it all right there.

The Biden administration often pivots to calling for comprehensive immigration reform and that Congress needs to provide the resources. Some of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle are discussing these very issues. But this is not an either/or scenario. Any discussions about the need for and the way we reform our immigration system are separate and apart from the need to enforce the laws to secure the border.

I am particularly struck by the President's comment on solutions. To explain these record numbers almost each and every month, we have been told: The surge is seasonal.

By the way, December is traditionally, as you can see, one of the lower months over the years, so the seasonal charge cannot be the issue.

The surge was the result of particular political conditions in relative countries.

Well, we see people coming in from hundreds of countries, not just surging from political conditions in a country.

Our economy is a magnet.

It very well could be.

It is a surge for asylum or those fleeing countries that are impacted by natural disasters.

All of these things, these excuses, are from the administration.

One thing is clear: Thousands of individuals and families are continually coming into our country unaccounted for, draining the resources of many of our communities.

But Congress needs to do our part to provide the funds and support for the men and women in the Agencies that are tasked with securing our border, enforcing our immigration laws, and stemming the flow of drugs, particularly fentanyl, from getting into our

country. I stand ready to do that and have done that through my work on the Appropriations Committee as the ranking member on Homeland Security.

Now, you may disagree with the tone and tactics of the last administration, but I think everyone can agree that border security was certainly a priority, and that is why so many of us called for President Biden to go to the border himself and see the crisis for himself. The numbers under President Trump were measurably less because of his policies.

There is an irony here because after 2 years of neglect, we have seen the need to go to the border in a way dwindled because the border crisis has actually come to the President, come to Washington, DC, come to West Virginia, come to Denver.

But some of the most critical comments about the impacts and failures of these policies have not come from Republicans but from a mayor of a town along the Rio Grande or from the Democratic mayor of the city of New York. Mayor Adams, mayor of New York City, has called this situation not just a crisis, but, instead, he has called it a disaster—exactly what it is. Mayor Adams is now seeking funds to help house those tens of thousands of migrants who are arriving in New York City.

Cities far into the interior of our country are being stretched to the max from the migrant surge. This is why we have to do everything we can to stem the influx.

We just passed an Omnibus appropriations bill that increases funding for these activities, particularly at CBP, ICE, and FEMA, for personnel and for technology. But imagine the men and women who have to deal with this all the time—the fatigue, the morale, the difficulties when you are so overrun. They are just pressed beyond capacity month after month and year after year. Each year, we have worked in a bipartisan way within Homeland Security to encourage and fund increased hiring for Border Patrol agents, for example. We are way down on those. But it has been difficult to fill these positions or to even maintain the current force.

One of the things I am most proud about in my tenure as ranking member on the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee is the creation and funding of a new position for CBP called the processing coordinators. We did this because too many of our trained agents were pulled from their duty stations and their mission to perform tasks that they are not prepared to do. This balance enables Agencies to go back to actually performing tasks they are supposed to do, they are equipped for, and they are trained for.

In addition to increasing resources for CBP, we must also be making efforts to increase interior enforcement. Once they get through the border and they declare asylum, they are told to come back in 5 to 7 years. Many of

them don't, but that is what they are—and they are in the interior of the country, and we don't use the interior enforcement mechanisms that we have. It is very unacceptable that thousands upon thousands are waiting—in some cases waiting 7 years before they can even begin any kind of removal procedures.

We just cannot let this crisis continue.

Bottom line: The issue was not a priority of the first 2 years of this administration. That is very obvious. As I said, the chart—this is the second year of the President's administration. This is the first year which is way above the averages, but it definitely cannot be ignored. The impact on too many families, too many businesses, and too many communities along the southern border, even in our State of West Virginia, simply cannot be ignored.

I am glad the President went, and now he is fully aware, hopefully, of the problem. I sure hope he is ready and willing to act.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from West Virginia.

**Mrs. CAPITO.** Madam President, I gave my remarks on border security, and as the new vice chair of the Republican conference, I have gathered some really strong voices here to share in the concerns that I have. I am really pleased to have the chair of our policy committee here, Senator ERNST from Iowa.

**Ms. ERNST.** Thank you, Vice Chair CAPITO. Wow. It is great to have another woman in leadership and leading these floor events now.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from Iowa.

#### BORDER SECURITY

**Ms. ERNST.** Madam President, I do want to thank my friend and colleague Senator CAPITO of West Virginia for her leadership in bringing Senate Republicans to the floor to talk about what is a very important issue to all of our constituents—the safety and the security of our great Nation.

Joe Biden created a crisis that has now turned into a complete catastrophe—one a mere photo op at a cleaned-up site in Texas won't fix. In just 2 years, under President Biden, over 4 million illegal immigrants have crossed the southern border—151 who are on the terror watch list. To top that off, we know of at least 1.2 million individuals who evaded the authorities. Those are the individuals we call the “got-aways.”

This border catastrophe is so much more than a flood of illegal immigrants hoping to jump the legal immigration line to get in the door. An open border is an invitation for mischief. It is a drug lord's dream.

In my home State of Iowa, drug overdoses among young people have risen 120 percent in the last few years. According to the State's Division of