

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

Criminal Investigation, there were four times the amount of fentanyl pills disguised as prescription drugs in 2022 as compared to the previous year.

We must act now to counter this deadly fentanyl epidemic. We, as lawmakers, should make the distribution of fentanyl resulting in death punishable by Federal felony murder charges. It is past time the consequences for intentionally inflicting an overdose fits the crime.

The cartels producing and smuggling this deadly drug into the United States are also funneling a significant number of illegal firearms and weapons, leading to barbaric violence. Just last week in California, a family of six, including a 10-month-old baby girl, was killed in a drug cartel execution. Unfortunately, the suspects are still at large.

Folks, this death and devastation cannot continue. In the coming weeks, I am looking forward to leading a bicameral delegation to the California-Mexico border. There, we plan to hear directly from Customs and Border Protection personnel about fentanyl and their ongoing drug interdictions. We will tour the port in San Diego—the epicenter for fentanyl trafficking into the United States—and get a firsthand look at the dangerous and critical work our Border Patrol agents are doing day in and day out.

I anticipate a common theme in all of our conversations: the need to physically secure our border, something my colleagues on the other side of the aisle used to support.

In 2007, then-Senator Joe Biden argued:

No great country can say it's secure without being able to secure its borders.

In 2010, Senator CHUCK SCHUMER supported border security and agreed the border lacked “the resources to fully combat the drug smugglers, gun runners, human traffickers, money launderers, and organized criminals that seek to do harm to innocent Americans along our border.”

Amen, folks. I agree with both of them. But where is that same attitude now, when the southern border has become immensely more dangerous, more permeable, and more lethal?

At every single one of my townhalls, over the past 3 weeks, and in dozens of interviews with Iowa media, I was asked about the crisis at the southern border.

So, to those on the left who say this is just a Republican stunt, I think you had better get out of the beltway and into Middle America, hear directly from the people you are supposed to serve, and you will quickly find out it is no stunt; it is reality.

Iowa families want solutions. They want safety, and they want to curtail the ever-increasing access to deadly drugs for their children, and they are not alone. The American people want a solution. In fact, over a majority of Americans—73 percent, according to one Pew Research poll—say they believe we need to increase security along the U.S.-Mexico border.

It is a great place to start, a place to find common ground.

In fact, there are left over border materials from the Trump administration just lying out in the desert, materials that taxpayers have paid for that are just collecting dust. And get this: The Federal Government is actually paying—yes, they have hired contractors, and they spend our tax dollars to do this—to watch over those materials that are lying there in the desert.

Without a secure border, we cannot have a larger conversation about reforming our immigration system.

So maybe, just maybe, a good place to start is for this administration to allow States that want to complete the border barrier to do so, instead of taking them to court.

Besides, doesn't Biden's Justice Department have enough on their hands right now?

So I agree with the Senator from West Virginia that this is an issue that needs to be addressed.

With that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, I have been on this floor many times to speak to this body about the issue of immigration on our southwest border. It is an issue. It has been an issue for the past couple of years, and, unfortunately, it continues to get worse.

As I talk to people in Oklahoma, they are very open to immigration. They just want legal immigration, and they want our system set up in such a way to incentivize legal immigration. But that is not what is happening right now.

Seven of us, 2 weeks ago, in a bipartisan codel, went to the southwest border, and we spent a couple of days there in the El Paso area and then over into Yuma, AZ, just to be able to visit with the folks on the line, with the folks in the communities, to be able to talk to those individuals who are taking care of human needs, to say: What is going on on the ground? What do we need to know?

I have been to the border many times. So I have had the opportunity to be able to hear some of the other reports, but it is always interesting just to be able to get the perspective of what is happening right now, because, as they say along the border, if you have been to one spot on the border, you have been to one spot on the border because it is different in each area, what they are facing.

Let me give you just one story from this. When we visited with the sheriff

and with the city manager and with the mayor of a small town in Arizona named Yuma, AZ—Yuma, AZ, is right on the border. It is an ag community. If you have eaten a salad in the past year, you have eaten something from Yuma, AZ, because they grow the vast majority of the lettuce for our country. Yuma, AZ, 3 years ago, in that area, had 8,100 people illegally cross in that year. For that one small town, they were trying to manage 8,100 people crossing 3 years ago. This past year, Yuma, AZ, had 310,000 people illegally cross the area.

So in 3 years, they went from 8,000 people illegally crossing to 310,000 people illegally crossing in a year. They are overwhelmed.

May I remind you, the mayor of New York is worried about an additional 40 to 50,000 people in New York City and having a difficult time absorbing that. Yuma, AZ, is trying to figure out how to absorb 310,000 people coming through their community.

The issues are complicated and they are difficult, but they are not unachievable. It is an issue of how are we going to enforce the law.

Now, I would tell you that I have met with the Border Patrol many times over the years, and one of the things they will often talk to me about is that they finally get a break each December because, typically, of Christmas, quite frankly, not as many people cross illegally during Christmastime. They stay home with families. And so December is usually a down month for illegal crossings, and it is year after year after year, until this year.

This year, there was a record number of people illegally crossing in December. So instead of going down, it actually went up when a quarter million people illegally crossed our southwest border in 1 month. That was last month, in December, a quarter million people.

This is a growing issue that requires attention, and it is not just the people this year. It is also all the other complications that come with it, because the Border Patrol is very clear: While we are managing this massive number of people coming from all over the world across that border, we can't go interdict drugs, we can't go interdict other things because we don't have the manpower to be able to do both.

So, again, last month, drug seizures in the United States increased 17.5 percent. In 1 month, it went up. This is an issue that requires real focus, and my concern is that the numbers are so large and it is so out of control that people are just saying: It is too big. I am not going to deal with it.

But the chaos along our border is continuing.

Now, the administration has made some bold statements of late. They said we are going to dramatically increase the number of people who are going to have expedited removal attached to them. Now, that sounds really severe—“expedited removal.” They