

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The Senator from Tennessee.

BORDER SECURITY

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, I had the opportunity this month to make a trip down to the southern border. And this was not my first trip down to that southern border. And I will have to say that I found our Border Patrol more discouraged than ever before. And I looked at it, and I really kind of used it as a basis for comparison every time I go down there, whether I am in California or Arizona or Texas, just talking with them and hearing where they are and what they are seeing and what their experiences are on the border every single day. And many of them feel like their job is an impossible task.

And this trip, I was in the Del Rio sector in Texas and had the opportunity to also talk with the Texas military that is down there on the border with the Texas DPS. They are down there on the border working. And there at Eagle Pass is where so many people are crossing into the country. And one of the things that they pointed out was they really can't stop this flow because, basically, the Biden administration has told them they can't stop this flow.

So we did a little checking into what has actually transpired since Joe Biden went into office. And, according to the Migration Policy Institute—which is not a conservative group, by any means; it is a more liberal policy think tank—in Joe Biden's first 100 days, he took 94 Executive actions that undermined the job that the Border Patrol is trying to do on that southern border.

So think about this. You are in service to your country, and the Commander in Chief is taking actions that make your job—the job that you have taken an oath to do—making that job harder to do, harder to execute your job.

Well, now, those who believe in open border policy, they think that taking 94 Executive actions to make it easier for people to illegally enter the country—they would see that as a good thing. But those of us who are constitutionalists, those of us who really believe in the rule of law, those of us who want our Nation to have an immigration policy that honors the rule of law, we look at that and we say: 94 Executive actions take a branch of this government, an Agency of this government, and makes it more difficult for them to do their job.

Now, many of my colleagues across the aisle have been no help in getting this situation at the border under control. They have voted to keep sending checks, basically, to those who illegally enter the country. They have approved a payday—a massive payday—a lot of funding going out to many of these sanctuary cities.

And, in 2022, Democrats voted to expand the Biden administration's catch-

and-release policy. This is people who are apprehended at the border and then they kind of get a checkmark. They get a plane ticket or a bus ticket to somewhere in the country and are told to show up on a date, maybe 2 years in the future, and have their asylum claim heard.

What they have also done—my Democratic friends across the aisle—is they have voted against giving Border Patrol the funding that they need to control the chaos that that policy has created.

So to many of us, it seems like things are backward; they are upside down. There should be agreement that we are going to honor the rule of law. There should be agreement that we are going to protect our sovereignty. There should be agreement that our border will be closed. There should be agreement that we are going to fund the Border Patrol. There should be agreement that we are going to fund ICE. There should be agreement that we are going to fund title 42, that we are going to fund building the border wall, and that we are going to fund additional screening for dangerous narcotics like fentanyl. But that has not been the case.

So open border, yes. But also, according to Border Patrol, what we have in this country with this administration is a lawless border policy. That is right—a lawless border policy.

And here is the reason for that. That was not said lightly. But it has become the reality because of the intentionality of this administration to leave that border open, to pass those Executive actions—a President, 94 Executive actions—that make it more difficult for Border Patrol to do their job—94. That is what you call intentional. That is what you call undermining what should be the policy and the support on the southern border for our Border Patrol.

Now, if you want to look at it on a month by month basis—December. Let's take just the month of December. Traditionally, you don't have as many people crossing in December, but because we have seen the border open and the "You all come" sign hanging out on that border, you have people coming across that border in record numbers.

In Yuma, AZ, they said they had people from 176 different countries speaking 200 different languages coming across that border.

In the month of December alone, there were 250,000—a quarter million—illegal encounters. These are the ones that the Border Patrol was able to apprehend. They are the ones who touch U.S. soil, raise their hands, and say: We claim asylum—250,000.

And over the past 2 years, there have been more than 4.1 million illegal border crossings. This is a record.

And you have the got-aways—the known got-aways—that you can see on surveillance but you can't get to them.

And as Border Patrol will tell you, the really bad guys—the really, really

bad guys—the unknown got-aways, they are the ones they don't see, but they are slipping into the country.

How do they know they are here? They find what they drop when they come across the river. They find clothes and shoes—carpet shoes. They see tracks. They see cars that come and pick these individuals up.

Do we have criminals coming into this country? Absolutely, we do.

In Eagle Pass, they told us that in the first 3 months of this fiscal year, in fiscal 2023, they apprehended 143 convicted criminals. Now, these are people who had committed felonies, whether it is rape or armed robbery or manslaughter. These are people with a criminal record.

Last year, in 2022, they apprehended 98 terrorists. They have apprehended dozens of gang members, MS-13 gang members.

And the thing that is so critical about this is that these individuals don't stay in Yuma or El Paso or Eagle Pass. That is where they come across, and they are ending up in your towns. They are ending up in Wisconsin. They are ending up in Tennessee, my beloved State.

I was talking with a police chief from Tennessee before I came over here. In rural Tennessee, the vast majority of the drugs they apprehend are either fentanyl or fentanyl-laced. They are using Narcan more than they ever thought they would need to use Narcan. TBI told us last month that the cartel is active in Tennessee.

Last week, I was visiting with a police chief from another city there in my State, and he said: Oh, it is not only active in the State; it is active right here in our town. He talked about some of the loss of life.

So as we discuss what is happening at the border, we have to look at the humanitarian crisis there.

Yes, everybody coming across that border, they will pay the cartel. Now, think about that. They paid \$5,000, \$7,000, \$10,000, whatever is the going rate. They are flying into places like Mexicali, Mexico, and then they are coming across the border.

Cartels are global organizations now. They are Big Business. Human trafficking is a \$13 billion-a-year business. It has grown in the last few years from a \$500 million-a-year business to a \$13 billion-a-year business. All of this ends up in our communities.

Indeed, every town is a border town. Every State is a border State right now because of this lawless border policy that is taking place at our southern border.

When you talk to the Border Patrol, they will tell you that there is a way to get this under control.

Was it better under the previous administration? Yes. The numbers were down. They did not see as many crossings because people understood that we were going to do some basic things. We were going to enforce the law. We were going to eliminate and we did eliminate the incentives for people to come.

We had “Remain in Mexico.” We ended catch-and-release. We had title 42. And we were doing what the Border Patrol has said for three decades they need: a physical barrier.

People commonly called it “Build the wall.” And wherever a wall could be built, there was a plan to build it, and they were working on it. And having people working on that border made certain that you didn’t have those border crossings.

Border Patrol has also said that they need better surveillance because, right now, the cartels have better technology than our Border Patrol. Think about this. With the cartels—multinational, big business—you don’t cross the border any way, shape, or form—sex trafficking, human trafficking, gangs, drug trafficking. Nobody and nothing comes across that border without the cartel getting their cut.

That is what is happening, and our Border Patrol is saying: Here is what we need. There is a way to fix this. We can fix this issue.

The Border Patrol says: Look, let us enforce the laws that are on the books. We have immigration laws. Let’s enforce them.

So you see why it is frustrating to them when you have a President and a Department of Homeland Security, and the President is signing 94 Executive actions that make it harder for them to do their job. It defies common sense.

Eliminate the monetary incentives that are out there. The cartel feels like they have a great business model. They get people to the border. People raise their hands, claim asylum. Then the U.S. taxpayer picks up the tab, buys them a plane ticket, a bus ticket, and gets them wherever they are wanting to go in the country.

When was the last time the Federal Government did something like that for you? Wherever you want to go, we will give you a ticket. We will get you there. We will provide you food, housing, shelter.

Look at those economic incentives and remove those.

As I said, “Remain in Mexico,” building the wall, those are things that the Border Patrol—those are the things that people who live on the border—tell us need to be done.

I was down here earlier this week talking about this trip and talked about a visit I had at a ranch. It was out in Uvalde. I met with people from Kinney County, TX, and from Uvalde, and some ranchers, some farmers, some business owners. Right now, with this border policy, it is making it very difficult for them to ranch. Some of them have cattle on their ranches. The migrants come in. They cut fences. So they are bearing that cost of fences.

Some are farmers with watermelons, lettuce, and cabbage, and their fields are getting torn up. Pecan orchards are being run through. And they are saying: Help us.

One rancher looked at me, and he said: Marsha, how long can we continue

this, and what is the endgame? Because he has people who die and they end up on his ranch, he finds it hard to do their cattle business.

We need to think carefully about this. The Border Patrol has said these are steps that would stop the chaos. This would bring some law and order back to the southern border, but the Biden administration is going to have to say: We got this policy wrong. We need to take these steps. We need to honor the service of the Border Patrol. We need to respect the people who live and work on this border. We need to make certain that we build that wall, that we secure this area.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, this is becoming a regular appearance on the Senate floor to talk about Social Security. It is something that most Americans think that Congress supports almost unanimously.

It is a program that has been with us. President Roosevelt, on August 14, 1935, signed the Social Security Act. Out of that came Medicare, when a Democratic Congress in 1965, with President Johnson’s signature, signed it.

We know what Medicare means. We know what Social Security means for people who live longer, healthier lives. No matter your income, no matter if you have been a Senator for 20 years, no matter if you are a CEO, no matter if you are a UAW member and at a Ford plant in Avon, no matter if you are a low-income worker at the Hilton Hotel on West Market in Akron, no matter your work, you are eligible, at a certain age, for Social Security and Medicare.

So what is the debate about? Well, the debate is philosophical, and I am not even sure what. It is partly my conservative colleagues who generally want to privatize Medicare and Social Security. For them, it seems to be something philosophic or ideological or sometimes it is just people wanting to support the insurance industry because if you privatize Medicare and Social Security, yes, it will help the insurance companies; yes, it will help the banks. If you privatize the VA, like many want to do—the Veterans’ Administration—undermining what veterans have earned by serving their country, it may help some private sector corporations. It will help pad their bottom line. It will help many CEOs make even more money, but it is wrong. When work has dignity, people have a secure retirement, veterans have benefits, and pen-

sions are protected, Americans can count on Medicare and count on Social Security.

A secure retirement shouldn’t be a partisan issue. It wasn’t a partisan issue, particularly in the 1930s. It is not a partisan issue to the American people. I don’t think you can tell a Republican from a Democrat who is 70 years old or 80 years old drawing Social Security and Medicare. They know they have earned it. They have paid into it for decades. As I have said, they have earned it.

It is one of the most unifying institutions in the country. Americans want to protect Social Security and Medicare. They want to make those programs stronger, Americans do. But elected officials—far too many people on this side of the aisle, as the Senator from Connecticut knows—far too many people from this side of the aisle think that we should privatize those programs; that they will be more efficient or some such philosophical jargon that they throw forward. But we know what will happen: insurance companies will make more money, banks will make more money, and people who have worked in this country and played by the rules all their lives get squeezed.

Today, down the hall—especially straight down the hall in the House of Representatives down there—the Republicans are threatening, in order to raise the debt limit—the debt limit is simply, we should pay our bills. The Trump administration and all administrations have run this deficit up. We should pay the bills. That is what it is about. They are refusing to pay the bills our Nation owes, and they are saying that if we don’t do what they want to do, then they are going to stop Social Security checks from going out. They are going to try to privatize Social Security.

They want to take this country and the American economy to the brink of default. They want to leverage their fiscal lunacy. It really is leveraging their fiscal lunacy, frankly, to cut your Social Security. It is that simple.

Then, as I said, there is privatizing Social Security. The details differ. The terms may change, but the goal is the same.

I have been in the Senate now, this is the beginning—it is my 17th year. Every couple of years, a few of the “wunderkinds” on that side of the aisle want to try to find a way to privatize Social Security, privatize Medicare, and privatize the Veterans’ Administration. It is nothing less than an attempt to go back on a bedrock promise.

(Ms. CORTEZ MASTO assumed the Chair.)

The Senator from Nevada understands that people pay into Social Security every paycheck. They tend to pay into Medicare every—well, that is not actually true. If you are really, really, really rich, you only pay into Social Security for the first part of the year because you have already paid enough for the year, and it is some philosophy that I don’t really understand.