

away those things and make it more difficult to actually fight through the appeals. They could put those back in today.

Today, they could end the Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, Venezuela program that they created to allow folks to be able to come in in greater numbers from those four countries. They started that program. They could end that today.

They could end the catch-and-release that they have created at the southern border. They could end that today. They started it. They could turn that off.

They could restart the cooperative agreements with Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to stop the flow of migrants coming from Central America up as they are coming through those areas. They could do that today.

They could reinstate the "Remain in Mexico" program. All the structure is there. The court required them to have it. They could actually use it, and that would make a huge difference today.

They could actually start prosecuting border crossing cases from start to finish. What do I mean by that? This administration is starting the process of prosecuting individuals, but halfway through, they are just dropping the case. Well, it doesn't take long for the word to get out to people who illegally cross that even if you start the prosecution, this administration will drop it and will not finish it. They text family members back home and say "come," and the next group actually comes from there.

This administration is currently finding new ways to allow people to come in. In States like Oklahoma—my State is currently being prosecuted by the Department of Justice because we passed laws in our State to put greater requirements on people that are illegally present in the State and have committed criminal acts. It used to be, under the previous administration, if someone was illegally present and they committed a criminal act, they were more active to remove those. Right now, the Department of Justice is actually putting pressure on my State of Oklahoma for pressuring people that are illegally present and also have committed a criminal act.

The Department of Justice could actually enforce our southern border rather than actually go after States that are trying to actually enforce the law in our own States.

Quite frankly, one of the things this administration could do today is to vet people coming across our border better, because they are currently not coordinating all of the data points we have for foreign individuals. They are not checking against all of those systems when people are crossing our border illegally.

This administration and this President need to stop saying there is nothing he can do until Congress acts. Congress does need to act, but there is a lot he could do that would make a huge

difference. And it is not just my opinion; I can prove it with fact. Just compare this Democrat President and his number of illegal crossings against the last Democrat President and his number of illegal crossings: Biden, 2.5 million a year; Obama, half a million a year.

I understand this President doesn't want to enforce what President Trump did, although that was more effective than what President Obama did, but he should do at least what President Obama did.

Stop playing politics with this on all sides. Stop running a speech that I have given on this floor for his campaign purposes unless he wants to run this speech and to say this President needs to step up and do his job.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President and my colleagues, for too long, political leaders have shied away from being honest and having a difficult conversation with the American people about our national security. Elected officials have kicked the can down the road, failing to tell the country just how dangerous the world has become. It is past time to confront this issue.

Many Americans don't know that the safety we enjoy has been secured by a global network of U.S. military bases, diplomatic efforts, and international coalitions, as well as massive amounts of equipment and ammunition. We have taken our security for granted, not knowing that much of it has been enabled by a previous once-in-a-generation investment made decades ago.

President Ronald Reagan led Congress to rebuild the U.S. military in the 1980s. I will hasten to add that it was a bipartisan Congress who joined President Reagan in this effort. Americans have been living off that investment ever since.

Because of those efforts, we have rested easy under the umbrella of overwhelming military superiority. Today, though, our military streak is diminishing to dangerous lows—dangerous lows. That umbrella of security has become a false sense of security. The U.S. Navy is the smallest and oldest it has been in over eight decades—80 years. Our Air Force is shrinking. Much of our military infrastructure is out of date.

This is a fact, and it is no secret. Time and again, U.S. military leadership comes before Congress and tells us we are facing the most dangerous security environment since at least the Cold War, if not since World War II.

Most Americans don't know that we are long overdue for a generational replenishment of our weaponry. We have delayed updating our military even as China has gotten closer and closer to matching our military might. The news gets even worse: China is actually multiplying its strength by spear-

heading a new axis of aggression, joined by Russia, Iran, and North Korea. So far, China has not moved against us because its dictator, Xi Jinping, knew he would lose, but just over the horizon, he might have reason to feel differently.

We in Congress must tell the American people what is at stake. Failing to deter China would immediately trigger a global economic depression. Losing to Beijing would extend the hardship, darkening the course of the entire 21st century. I am not trying to be alarmist, but we need to be honest.

This bleak future is possible but not inevitable. I recently introduced a detailed plan to rebuild American military might and restore our ability to deter threats. It would be a downpayment for our future. It would be expensive—many worthwhile things are expensive—but it would be far less costly than war.

Political neglect has put us in this vulnerable position. It does not have to be this way. My goal is to launch a much needed conversation about how we can turn the page on that complacency and to get started right away with corrective action. I have been inviting my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join in this discussion. I will continue to extend that invitation. But there is really no time to waste. We need to get started this year. We can do so next week when the Armed Services Committee in the Senate begins the NDAA markup, the National Defense Authorization Act. During our meetings, I will introduce an amendment to raise the level of this year's defense investment significantly. My amendment will be an opportunity for the kind of debate for which this Chamber is renowned.

In considering national spending priorities, we have thought of ourselves as hamstrung by spending caps, but we simply have to dream bigger when it comes to our vital national security. I hope this debate will lead to a defense topline number that meets the moment.

President Reagan's buildup kept the peace and won the Cold War, and it did so without firing a shot. The future can be just as peaceful and secure for our children and our grandchildren, but it is time we made that investment in the future.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, before he leaves the floor, I want to say to the Senator from Mississippi how proud I am to stand here beside him as he delivers an inconvenient truth, which is, our national security is not something we can take for granted. You pay for it with your treasure or your blood. That is an inconvenient truth.

In the course of our Nation's history, we remain the beacon of freedom, opportunity, liberty, and prosperity for the world, but we cannot take that for granted because we see everywhere we look rising threats and challenges to

America's leadership role in the world. Whether it is in Europe, whether it is in Asia, whether it is in the Middle East, the threats and the challenges go on and on.

What emboldens our adversaries is when they believe that we lack the resolve and commitment to do what is necessary to preserve the peace. The way you preserve the peace is to make sure none of your adversaries want to take a chance to engage with you militarily because they know they will lose. That is what deterrence is all about.

I think the Senator from Mississippi has hopefully started a really critical discussion at a critical time when we sort of lurch back and forth between continuing resolutions and an appropriations process that is fundamentally broken; when, in fact, the money we appropriate through that process is only about one-third of the money the Federal Government spends. The Federal Government spends trillions of dollars more on mandatory programs and through the Tax Code. We need to look at all of that spending, and we need to rightsize our commitment to what should be our No. 1 priority, which is the safety and security of the American people and our way of life, and to figure out what that means in terms of where the Federal Government spends money elsewhere.

And it is a very, very important debate. We shouldn't be afraid of it. Nobody is talking about touching Social Security or Medicare.

Both President Biden and President Trump has said no matter what the outcome of the election is, neither one of them want to touch it. We could argue the merits of that. Certainly, those debates won't occur without bipartisan leadership, like Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan, but in the absence of our addressing those challenges, certainly there are other mandatory spending programs, which are essentially on autopilot, that grow at 7 or 8 percent a year that we can look at and say: Does this still make sense?

Maybe it made sense 10 or 20 years ago when that program was created, but maybe we ought to look at indexing the amount of money that we spend to inflation, rather than just have an open-ended entitlement.

And then there is the Tax Code. I know next year we are going to be looking at the expiration of the individual tax rates of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

President Biden has said that he is happy to have those expire, which would result in a tax increase for 62 percent of American taxpayers and a \$3 trillion tax increase. I know his staff came back later and said: No, no, no. He is not for raising taxes on anybody who makes less than \$400,000 a year, but that is not what would happen if you let these tax rates expire next year.

So we are on the precipice, I hope, of having a fundamental debate and deci-

sion about the future of our country, and it starts with a discussion about America's leadership role in maintaining the peace because there is no other country in the world that can fill that gap. And we know that if that gap is created, that it will be filled likely by the Vladimir Putins, the President Xis in China, or the mullahs in Tehran, and people like Kim Jong Un in North Korea.

So I will just conclude now by saying I am really profoundly grateful to our friend from Mississippi for having the courage and demonstrating the leadership to initiate this discussion. It could not be more important, and it could not be more urgent.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. President, let me turn to another crisis, and that is the one on our southern border. Since President Biden took office, U.S. Customs and Border Protection has recorded 7.8 million illegal crossings at the southern border—7.8 million souls.

Now, just to provide some context, in over 3 years, we have logged twice as many illegal border crossings as we did during the full 8 years of the Obama administration. President Biden has been there about 3½ years; President Obama was there 8 years, but President Biden has racked up double the number of illegal crossings in 3½ years that occurred during President Obama's term in office.

President Biden has neglected the border for so long, it is now much more than just a question about our immigration system; it is a serious national security threat. The southern border has become an open gateway for drug traffickers, terrorists, and criminals of all stripes to enter the United States and disperse through our communities, all across this great land.

And there is no question that this crisis was able to grow and expand because of the conscious policies of the Biden administration. In other words, this isn't an accident. This is not the result of negligence. This is intentional.

In his first 100 days in office, President Biden issued more than 94 Executive actions related to immigration, many of which were designed to overturn each one of President Trump's effective border policies, and we all see how that turned out.

In the 3 years since, the Biden administration has taken hundreds of other Executive actions that have made it easier—not harder—easier for people to cross the border illegally and remain in the United States.

Now, with election day 5 months away, President Biden has taken a look at the polls and realized that the American people aren't happy with his open border policies. His poll numbers are in the tank.

So the President did what I presume any politician would do is launch a last-ditch effort to show that, no, that is not where I am; that is not what I believe; that is not what we should do.

But the fact is, nobody is going to be fooled by the actions the President took yesterday. It is a ploy. It is an election-year stunt. It is a shell game. You pick your metaphor.

Yesterday, President Biden issued a proclamation that would shut off access to the asylum system if the daily number of illegal border crossings reaches an average of 2,500. Well, if that makes sense, why wouldn't you do it with the first person coming across the border? Why would you say 2,500 a day are welcome to come into the country no questions asked?

But there are a few points the American people need to understand: One, as I said, the President is effectively saying it is OK for 2,499 border crossings per day. That is OK; you got the green light on that. The green light is not just to the migrants; it is also to the criminal organizations that smuggle these people for millions and millions or rather billions and billions of dollars.

And that 2,499 that are being waved across the border, that amounts to more than 900,000 per year. Now, 2,499 may not seem like a big number, but 900,000 per year seems like a lot, and it is. For some reason, the 2,500th person to cross the border is a bridge too far for this administration now, 5 months before the general election.

In my view, one illegal border crossing is one too many. Now, don't get me wrong. I believe legal immigration has been essential to America and remains so—legal, humane, and orderly immigration policy. Very few of us and our forebearers were born here. Most came from somewhere else in hope of a better life and became Americans and embraced our values and our way of life. But President Biden has outsourced his immigration policy to criminal cartels. It is madness.

Secondly, the Biden administration won't likely be able to enforce these caps anyway. In other words, they are just artificial. In order to waive migrants back to Mexico or return them to their home countries, those countries have to be willing to accept them. That is what President Trump negotiated with his "Remain in Mexico" policy. What did President Biden do? He basically wiped it off the books.

Now, it is no guarantee Mexico is going to be willing to accept these folks. What happens if Mexico says, "We are at capacity"?

My guess is, those individuals will be released into the United States, which is what has happened to this point, and many will never be heard from again, unless they have the bad judgment and misfortune to commit some crime and happen to be encountering U.S. law enforcement.

The final point I want to make is this: The administration had been claiming for years that it doesn't have the authority to restrict illegal border crossings. Well, apparently President Biden woke up yesterday and realized he did.