

Make no mistake, our Democrat colleagues have a well-organized ground game, and they will stop at nothing to undermine the gains we have seen just in a single year, since President Trump came into office. That is the way our system works.

To top it off, Democrats have built a nationwide lobby to support their efforts, otherwise known as the mainstream media. But this brings me to another problem that undermines our system of self-government, which is that it is too easy for people who can't legally vote to cast a ballot—in other words, voter fraud.

When a ballot is cast by someone that is not qualified to vote in an election, it undermines the integrity of the ballot for the people who are qualified to vote—for example, an illegal alien. Illegal aliens, noncitizens are technically barred from registering to vote, but in some States, people are not even required to show proof of citizenship at the time of registration.

Every time we talk about voter ID, the left says we are trying to disenfranchise minorities and the underrepresented, but that is not consistent with the facts. In Texas, where voter ID is required, you don't have to have a driver's license. You can get a government-issued identification at no cost.

Democrats know that if you actually require people to show that they are qualified to vote, their voter base will shrink, especially in sanctuary States that have been havens for illegal aliens for years.

Not a single person in this country, I think, truly believes that you cannot get a valid identification if you are a U.S. citizen.

Again, this used to be a bipartisan consensus.

You need identification to buy a car, to buy a phone, to get on an airplane, to open a bank account, to cash a check. So I find it hard to believe that any rational person would object to requiring a person to show that they are a citizen to vote in elections that are meant to represent all of us at all levels of government.

With the dramatic rise in mail-in voting that happened during COVID-19, many Americans had concerns about this particular method of voting and that it might be abused. But if the truth be told, it was, but you don't hear much about the convictions across the country against those who committed voter fraud.

After all, if the ballot is mailed to the wrong address, there is not much stopping the wrong person from filling it out, pretending to be someone they are not, forging a signature, and dropping it in the mail. It is pretty easy. It is too easy.

Nor is there anything to stop ballot harvesting, which is actually legal in some States, and collection by "well-meaning" organizations and individuals who are just trying to "help out their fellow citizens."

Well, this is a very disturbing pattern. I believe the American people deserve better than to have their concerns about election security swept under the rug.

I want to commend my friends, the leadership in the State of Texas—the legislature, the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the speaker—for taking this issue seriously and working hard to make sure that mail-in voting is secure.

But, unlike Texas, many blue States are, unfortunately, not doing their part to make sure only legally qualified voters can cast a ballot. So I am thankful to our colleague Senator MIKE LEE of Utah for introducing the SAVE America Act, which will require proof of citizenship at the time of registration, as well as photo identification at the time of voting.

It doesn't seem like a big burden for voters to be able to show that they are qualified to vote and that they are who they say they are through voter ID.

I am a proud cosponsor of the SAVE America Act, which I believe is long overdue, to strengthen the integrity of our election systems. If you think about it, all of us have a stake in this battle, whether we live in a red State or a blue State—particularly in Federal elections—because for every unqualified voter who casts a ballot, it undermines or dilutes the vote of those of us who are legally qualified to vote. So I hope the U.S. Senate will take up and pass this legislation, and I and others have been discussing it with the majority leader.

But something much simpler that each and every one of us can do that will strengthen our system of representative government is to get to the polls and vote.

Now, in Texas, the primary is on March 3, coming up here very soon. We start early voting on February 17. So there is a lot of time, a lot of opportunity for people to cast their ballot and to participate in their primary, whether it is on the Democratic side or the Republican side.

I know voting is voluntary, but if you think about what is good for our country and what is good for representative democracy, you would agree with me that voter participation is far below what it should be.

If you walk out the doors of this Chamber and down the hall into the Capitol Rotunda, you will see a famous painting by John Trumbull, the Declaration of Independence. This painting depicts our Founding Fathers gathered around to sign the monumental document that would set the United States apart on a new course in history.

Thomas Jefferson, of course, wrote in the Declaration of Independence that governments derive "their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed." Those who signed risked their very lives because, by doing so, they were committing an act of treason against Great Britain, at the time.

This year, of course, we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the

Declaration of Independence. So it is worth reflecting, once again, not only on the principles of self-government that our country was founded on but also the sacrifices made by our Founders and others to protect those rights.

If these men and women, over time, in the armed services and elsewhere, were willing to risk their lives in order to secure representation, surely each and every one of us ought to do our part to participate in self-government by exercising our right to vote that so many have fought and died for.

I urge each and every one of my constituents in Texas, but I would like to speak to all 330 million Americans: Please participate in your elections. Ours happens to be one of the earliest this midterm election season on March 3.

We all need to appreciate the privilege of self-government. So just don't sit at home and complain or yell at the TV set about what is happening. Make a difference. Let your voice be heard. Participate in this incredible experiment now we have had for 250 years in self-government that has served us so well.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. KAINÉ. Mr. President, I rise to talk about the issue that will dominate attention in the Senate between now and next Friday, Friday the 13th, a discussion about reforms to the Department of Homeland Security and the activities it has engaged in all around the country.

It is common, during the 13 years that I have been in the Senate, for folks to talk about immigrants as a problem. It is very uncommon for people to take this floor and talk about immigrants as a strength. And based on my experience in 31 years now, coming on 32, in elected office in Virginia, I believe immigrants are a strength and not a problem. That doesn't mean there aren't issues that we need to resolve, but I think it is high time that people in this Chamber talked about immigrants to this country and recognized the strengths that they bring.

President Trump and his administration have launched upon an unprecedented campaign against immigrants—immigrant crackdowns in Virginia and elsewhere. And the claim of the administration and many who support it is that this is because of a desire to protect Americans and rid American streets of criminals.

I maintain that President Trump has, instead, demeaned and dehumanized immigrants and their countries of origin since day one of his political career for matters completely unrelated to public safety. And since he has been in power to be President, both in his first term and now this term, he has thrown everything he can at keeping people out and even rounding people up who he views as the wrong kind of people, the "other." His efforts to round

up thousands and thousands of people he views as “the other” on spurious charges and without due process are sweeping up all kinds of people, including children, and they are hurting our country, hurting our economy, and hurting my Commonwealth.

I would like to start with what the President has said. These policies are motivated by a President who has said a number of things about the immigrant community, and I think these express the basic motivations for his actions. There is a beautiful phrase in the New Testament that says: From the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks. On this topic, the President has a very full heart, and he has spoken very plainly about his motivation.

In the speech marking the beginning of his campaign in 2016, day one, President Trump embarked on a tirade against Mexicans and Mexican-Americans saying:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best . . . they're sending people that have lots of problems . . . they're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

So most of them are bad—drug addicts, criminals, rapists—but some are good people. That is the very essence of bigotry and discrimination, and we know that to be a lie.

One of President Trump's first actions when he became President in 2017 was to impose a ban on people entering the country if they were coming from countries that were predominantly Muslim in nature. It wasn't based on the vetting of an individual to determine if they posed a problem. If you are a Muslim, if you come from a country that was predominantly Muslim, you are banned—the very essence of bigotry and discrimination. That policy was struck down by the Supreme Court. The administration recalibrated it to do it in a different way, but the President revealed what is his motivation.

A few months into his first term, he said in an Oval Office meeting of top officials that he thought that Haitians “all have AIDS”—a despicable and discriminatory lie.

And he also said in that same meeting, we should keep Nigerian immigrants out of the United States because, if they come to America, they would never “go back to their huts”—derogatory, discriminatory.

I don't like to curse. I am not perfect at this, but I don't like to curse. And when I try, I can't do it convincingly. And I don't like to quote people who are cursing, but I am going to do that because I don't think this should be sanitized.

Later in his first term at a meeting with top Cabinet officials and the White House staff and Senators, President Trump said:

Why do we want all these people from shithole countries coming here?

Now at the time when that was revealed, the President denied it, said he had not used that phrase. But we know

that that was a lie because, recently, at rallies he has been acknowledging that he used that phrase, and he still uses that phrase. Just a few months ago, he loudly and proudly repeated the same line. He said:

Remember I said that to the senators that came in, the Democrats. They wanted to be bipartisan. So they came in . . . we had a meeting. And I say: Why is it we only take people from shithole countries, right?

This is the President recently acknowledging that language, discriminatory and bigoted language.

Why can't we have some people from Norway, Sweden—just a few—let us have a few from Denmark—do you mind sending us a few people? Send us some nice people, do you mind? But we always take people from Somalia. Places that are a disaster, right? Filthy, dirty, disgusting, ridden with crime.

Bigoted and discriminatory—linger on that for a second. Some nice people from Scandinavia, instead of filthy or dirty places like Somalia.

Recently the President, after canceling many refugee programs from other nations—including Cuba—opened up a path for refugees to come from South Africa if—they are Afrikaners. South Africa has all kinds of ethnic groups. Afrikaners are just one. The path that the President opened for refugees coming to the United States from South Africa was limited to Afrikaners, even though Afrikaners are represented in the current National Unity government of South Africa, but he claimed that Afrikaners are being persecuted.

Notice a few months later, he also claimed that Nigerians were being persecuted if they were Christians, and he used military action against Nigeria, but he wouldn't open up a path for Nigerians to come to the United States.

He asserts that Afrikaners are being persecuted against, and so we will have a refugee program for them. But Nigerians who are being persecuted, even for their Christian faith, there is no refugee path for them. What is the difference between an Afrikaner and a Nigerian subject to persecution? I think we all know the answer to the question.

So if you support President Trump's immigration policies, I think you have to look in the mirror and grapple with the fact that his motivation is about fundamentally not liking people of different skin colors from continents or countries that he views as unfavorable or who come from religious backgrounds that he views as unfavorable. Anyone supporting President Trump's policies ought to look in the mirror and ask if that is a motivation that you share or is that a motivation you reject?

Let me turn now from the President's motivations that explain this entire policy to the actual actions. President Trump's immigration crackdown has been violent. It has been inhumane. It has rounded up innocent people—mothers, children. It has rounded up U.S. citizens. The visceral

disdain for immigrants, but particularly for those who don't look like him or from countries he doesn't like, has led to a crackdown that has far exceeded—far exceeded—the stated claim that it is about law enforcement and public safety. While he and his enablers claim that they are after the “worst of the worst” or that they are only going after people who are criminals, that is just not true.

Last month, Federal agents detained this youngster, 5-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos, and his father from their driveway in Minneapolis, MN.

Is this a criminal? Is this a public safety threat to the United States? How could you make that argument with a straight face or accept it from a President with the kind of motivation that he has demonstrated in his hostility to immigrants?

Liam had just gotten home from preschool with a Spider-Man backpack and his bunny stocking cap. He and his father were held in a facility in Texas, more than 1,000 miles away from their home, for over a week until a Federal judge ordered that they be released.

Dangerous criminal. Keeping our streets safe.

Over a 2-month period last year, according to the right-leaning Cato Institute, nearly three-quarters of people rounded up by ICE had no criminal conviction—none whatsoever. Of those who did have a criminal conviction, the biggest category was—drum roll—traffic violations.

In February 2025, 3,165 immigrants with no criminal charges or convictions were detained by ICE—3,000 in February 2025. Last month, January 2026, the number of people detained by ICE with no criminal conviction and no criminal charges had grown to 25,193. From September 21, 2025, until last month, January 7, single-day ICE detentions increased to 11,296 a day. But, again, this stat showed that well over two-thirds had no criminal convictions and no criminal charges.

How about U.S. citizens? As of October 2025, more than 170 U.S. citizens were detained by immigration agents. That is what we know of. Two dozen were held for more than a day without being able to call their loved ones or a lawyer. Nearly 20 of those U.S. citizens detained were children, and 2 of them had cancer. More than 50 American citizens were detained by ICE on suspicion of being undocumented. And, guess what? All 50 were Latino, people whose skin color or ethnic background have been demonstrated by the President to be those he disapproves.

Late last month ICE agents went to a U.S. citizen's house with no warrant, broke his door down, dragged him from his home at gunpoint in his underwear in below-freezing temperatures in front of his 4-year-old grandson. Neighbors took it all on video. The ICE agents drove him to the middle of nowhere and made him stand in the cold while they photographed him undressed. Then they finally drove him back to

his home and dropped him off there with his broken down front door.

This is not about law enforcement. This is not about public safety. It is a campaign against people because of the color of their skin or where they are from.

If you support President Trump's policies, you have to ask yourself: Wait a minute. It is not really about law enforcement. It is about 5-year-old kids. It is about U.S. citizens. It is about people who have no criminal background. And you ought to ask yourself whether that is, in fact, what you support.

Immigrants are crucial and beneficial to the economy in Virginia and throughout America. Just some statistics: Nationwide, our immigrant families generated more than \$236 billion in income in 2022 and paid nearly \$66 billion in local, State, and Federal taxes.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that immigration flows to the United States that are projected currently will likely increase American gross domestic product by nearly \$9 trillion between now and 2034, if we don't screw it up.

As of June 2025, 15.4 percent of U.S. residents are immigrants, including naturalized U.S. citizens. So everyone in this room has, in their State, hard-working immigrant families who do not appreciate being demonized by the President and his policies.

Immigrants make up 13.2 percent of Virginia's population. That is more than one in eight. When I was born, it was 1 in 100. I was born in 1958. So 1 of 100 Virginians in 1958 had been born in another country. Today it is one of eight. I guess that must mean, if you follow the President's logic, that this has been a horrible thing for Virginia. To the contrary, Virginia, by my last checking, was one of only two States in the United States that, in my lifetime, has gone from bottom quarter per capita income to top quarter per capita income. There is nothing about life in Virginia today that is not dramatically better than in 1958.

And the growth of our immigrant populations with their strength and their innovation and their culture has been a huge part of the reason that Virginia has gone from back of the pack economically to front of the pack economically.

Virginia has started to see some population decline in recent years, except for immigration. Immigration has actually enabled our State to continue to grow. Growth is helpful to the economy. Immigrants contribute \$104 billion annually to the Virginia economy. Get this: 29 percent—nearly one-third—of our Main Street business owners in Virginia are immigrants; our Main Street business owners, nearly 30 percent. Sixteen percent of our workforce is immigrant.

Let me tell you about a couple of industries, specifically, and give you some Virginia statistics: 34 percent of our chefs are immigrants; 44 percent of

our computer engineers are immigrants; 28 percent of our childcare workers are immigrants; 52 percent of our painters are immigrants; 46 percent of our agriculture workers—ag and forestry is still the No. 1 industry in Virginia as it is in most States in the country. Forty-six percent of our ag workers are immigrants; 43 percent of our construction workers are immigrants. Health aides—more than 20 percent of our health professionals are immigrants. I notice this particularly when I visit rural Virginia; that if it weren't for immigrant-trained doctors and workers and allied health professionals, many of the rural parts of our State would not have health providers at all.

Demeaning and attacking, terrorizing and frightening, disrespecting immigrants is not only the wrong thing to do, it hurts our country and it hurts our economy.

What would we do without 46 percent of our agriculture workers? What would we do without 43 percent of our construction workers or 23 percent of our health aides? Don't they deserve some positive words? Some thanks, like: Thanks for choosing us. You could have chosen someone else. Instead, you chose to come here and enrich our communities.

And the skills I gave you are everything from sort of more manual skills to high-end computer engineering and health professions. I could have done this with virtually any profession in Virginia, and I would have made the same case. We would not be the Commonwealth that we are, the success that we are, without the growth of our immigrant populations.

I want to conclude by just saying, in being here for 13 years, I just have heard too few words on this floor that talk about the contributions that immigrants have made to this country during our entire history. Immigration is the transfusion into the bloodstream of the American economy and the American politic that keeps our Nation young at 250—new skills, new ideas, new connections to places around the world.

Are there challenges? Yes. Do we need order? Of course, we do. Should we reform? Yes. But it should be within the overall framework of immigrants like this little guy are not a problem. Our immigrant communities are part of what makes our Nation great and successful. I am tired, after more than 13 years, of hearing immigrants just dragged down, called "illegals"? Why don't we call people convicted of fraud "illegals"? Why don't we call people convicted of sexual harassment "illegals"?

There is only one kind of person that some label an "illegal" in the United States and that is if they have violated the laws to enter the country. What about all the other illegalities people in this country commit?

But there is only one kind of person we demonize with the label, and I am

tired of it. I am tired of people getting kicked around because of the countries they came from and color of their skin.

I speak from personal experience having worked as a missionary in Central America. And I know the kinds of people who come here, and I know why they come here. They come for the same reason my great-grandparents came here from Ireland in the late 1840s—because there weren't opportunities for them. The laws may be a little different today than then, but the motivations are no different.

Virtually, everybody in this Chamber has an immigration story where, thank God, their family decided that they could make a better life for themselves in the United States. And just as we don't demonize each other because we have immigrant roots, we shouldn't be demonizing people like this young 5-year-old's family and terrorizing them as we are.

Any policy that begins with the assumption that immigrations are a problem or a threat or a public safety concern, instead of beginning with the reality that our immigrant communities have been part of the great success of this Nation—any policy that starts with the wrong assumption is bankrupt morally, bankrupt legally, bankrupt economically, and it will hurt our Nation. It is already hurting our Nation and will continue to hurt it even further.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. RICKETTS. Mr. President, I rise today to note that the House, earlier today, passed a series of appropriations bills that will now be sent to the President's desk that will allow us to continue to fund our Agencies. And that is good news. It represents 11 of the 12 appropriations bills that we pass every year.

I want to thank our Republican leader for bringing these bills to the floor. I want to thank our chair of the Appropriations Committee SUSAN COLLINS and Ranking Member PATTY MURRAY for their work to be able to get that done. This is important work.

One of the reasons I came to the U.S. Senate was to be able to help bring fiscal responsibility. As Governor of Nebraska, my budget grew at 2.8 percent per year, on average, across 8 years. That demonstrates the sort of fiscal responsibility you find in States like Nebraska. It is part of our "Nebraska Solutions, Ready for America" is bringing that sort of fiscal responsibility here. It was sorely lacking under the Biden administration in Washington, DC.

In 2019, the Federal Government, broadly speaking, spent \$4.4 trillion, and we had a \$900 billion deficit. Under Joe Biden's leadership, by 2024, that spending had grown to \$6.8 trillion and a \$1.9 trillion deficit, more than doubling the deficit, a 55-percent increase over those 5 years—a 55 percent-increase over 5 years in that spending.