

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson  
**“Unprecedented Migration at the U.S. Southern Border: The Exploitation of Migrants  
through Smuggling, Trafficking, and Involuntary Servitude.”**

Wednesday, June 26, 2019

This is the third in a series of hearings about the unprecedented crisis at the southern border. Last month alone, U.S. Border Patrol apprehended 132,887 aliens attempting to enter the United States unlawfully at the southern border. More than one million illegal migrants are projected to be apprehended this fiscal year, the highest in more than a decade. What makes this problem even worse is the change in composition of illegal migrants from single adult male economic migrants that can be quickly returned to unaccompanied children and family units who are able to exploit our system and stay in the U.S. indefinitely.

Today we will examine an aspect of the crisis frequently ignored: the exploitation of migrants through smuggling, trafficking, and forced labor. It starts with the journey into the United States. At the mercy of their smugglers, migrants who cannot keep up are abandoned or left for dead. Women are sexually assaulted; some studies suggest as many as 1 out of 3 female migrants may be victims. Corrupt government officials demand bribes, while cartels, backed with threats of violence, demand payment from everyone crossing the border. Some smugglers require payments before migrants are allowed to cross the border, causing some migrants to mortgage their homes. Those who cannot pay up front become indebted to traffickers. One method traffickers use to get paid is to hold their victims in stash houses, take videos of beatings, and then send those videos to their families demanding payment for their release.

Once migrants arrive at the U.S. border, our broken immigration system encourages other kinds of exploitation. Migrants know that crossing the border with a child ensures their prompt release. A few recent DHS investigations found that 15 to 30 percent of suspicious family units investigated were fraudulent. These are only pilot programs; the true extent of the fraud could be even more pervasive. With easy access to fake documents, smugglers are pairing children with adults, often males that have no relation to the child. We have seen this go horribly wrong. In one case, a 3-year-old child was abandoned in a cornfield with only a note with his name and an out-of-service phone number attached to his shoe.

Even when migrants make it into the United States, the promise of a better life can quickly become a living hell as smuggling transforms into sex trafficking or other forms of involuntary servitude. In one case, Rafael Cadena-Sosa and his family would lure girls as young as fourteen to be smuggled into the United States from Mexico with promises of jobs. He then imposed large smuggling debts on them, brutally beat and sexually abused them, and threatened their families with death. He made this horrific reality even worse by forcing them to prostitute themselves for as many as 12 hours a day, six days a week. Fortunately, he was caught and is now serving 15 years in jail. How many other Raphael Cadena-Sosa's are still abusing their human trafficking victims?

Tragically, that is not an isolated incident. Our Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations held hearings about forced migrant labor on chicken farms in Ohio. And in my state of Wisconsin, a Georgia-based human tracking scheme moved legal agricultural workers

into the state, forcing them to illegally pay recruiting fees and work in dangerous conditions. If the migrants protested, they were threatened with deportation. These stories demonstrate how predators take advantage of vulnerable migrants. With our immigration system overwhelmed, the risk of exploitation is amplified.

The dedicated men and women of Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, among other agencies, work tirelessly to combat these problems. They work in trying and arduous conditions to defend our border, and when called upon to perform tasks outside of their job descriptions, they do so with dignity and compassion despite woefully inadequate resources. I am grateful to the witnesses for being here today.