

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
**“Unprecedented Migration at the U.S. Southern Border: What Is Required to Improve
Conditions?”**

Tuesday, July 30, 2019

For more than a year and a half, officials at the Department of Homeland Security and throughout the Trump Administration have been warning that the migration crisis at our southern border is overwhelming our system. Their warnings have been blunt: children have been and continue to be at serious risk.

In the first nine months of fiscal year 2019, more than 454,000 family member units and unaccompanied alien children already have entered the United States and been apprehended at the southern border by Border Patrol. On average, Customs and Border Protection apprehended or deemed inadmissible 4,652 immigrants crossing our southern border per day in May of this year.

Given this flow, no one should be surprised that Border Patrol stations are well beyond their capacity. Border Patrol stations are simply not designed to hold families and children in custody, and certainly not at these numbers. They are police stations, built for the short-term detention of a small number of people, typically adult males. The way the system is supposed to work is that within 72 hours of apprehension, Border Patrol transfers unaccompanied alien children to Health and Human Services custody, and families to Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody. But because those facilities are also overwhelmed, CBP has had no choice but to care for migrants in their custody for longer periods of time while waiting for space to open up in other facilities.

On May 1st, the Trump Administration asked for an emergency DHS supplemental funding bill of \$4.6 billion to help care for children and families. It took Congress two months to approve the needed funds to care for these children. It is my understanding that within a couple of weeks of passage of the supplemental funding bill, Border Patrol reduced the number of unaccompanied children in its custody from 2,700 to approximately 300, with the average time in custody has decreased to around 30 hours.

In these difficult circumstances, the men and women of Border Patrol have worked tirelessly and acted valiantly to secure our border while also providing care for all migrants in their custody. Through June 2019, Border Patrol agents have rescued more than 3,400 people along the border. Of those saved, nearly 2,500 people were being smuggled in dangerously hot tractor-trailers. About 40 to 60 percent of Border Patrol agents' time is now spent caring for families and children. The committee has heard multiple stories of agents going above and beyond the call of duty to care for migrants. Border Patrol agents rock babies to sleep, make bottles and meals, play video games with children, and donate clothes and food to the migrants. I have seen it for myself on multiple trips to the border this year. These agents stand in stark contrast to the smugglers who profit handsomely from their illicit trade, yet all too often leave families and children in deadly situations.

Rather than point fingers at the brave men and women of DHS, who have done their best with the limited resources we have provided them, members of Congress should be acting on

legislation to solve the underlying problems. The Administration has been asking Congress for the resources and legal tools to solve this crisis for a long time, but effective legislation currently seems out of reach. However, as long as I am Chairman, this committee will continue to highlight the problem and tenaciously pursue common sense, nonpartisan solutions.