

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
“Unprecedented Migration at the U.S. Southern Border: A Year in Review”
Wednesday, November 13, 2019

Today’s hearing will examine the administration’s efforts over the last year to respond to unprecedented migration along our southern border. During the 2019 Fiscal Year, U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents there apprehended a total of 977,509 inadmissible or illegal migrants. The vast majority of these migrants—851,508—illegally entered our country between the ports of entry. Of those, 473,682 were members of a family unit and 76,020 were unaccompanied alien children. Notably, these numbers do not include migrants who entered the country illegally and evaded law enforcement, which U.S. Border Patrol estimated to be over 150,000 additional migrants - but the truth is, no one really knows.

At the peak of the crisis in May, 144,000 migrants were apprehended or deemed inadmissible. By September, that number was reduced to 52,000. Although the illegal flow has decreased from May’s daily average of 4,651, the daily average still exceeds 1,400. Former Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson has stated that, during his tenure, 1,000 apprehensions was a bad day. Now, even our best days exceed that mark.

Over the course of the last year, our Committee has examined the growing crisis, heard from the frontlines, and focused on the problems it has created. Having examined these facts and laid out the reality, we have begun to discuss which legal loopholes need to be closed. Unfortunately, Congress has not been able to find a bipartisan solution that can pass.

While Congress remains entrenched in partisan fights, the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice have taken actions that significantly reduced the flow of migrants. These include the Migrant Protection Protocols, which requires migrants to remain in Mexico while their asylum applications are processed; the Interim Asylum Rule, which helps to ensure the integrity of our refugee laws; and agreements with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. I am particularly encouraged to see DHS implementing a program - similar to our bipartisan “Operation Safe Return” proposal - to pilot ways to more efficiently process asylum claims and safely and quickly return those that do not have a valid claim.

Until we get illegal immigration under control, it will be almost impossible to reform our legal immigration system to meet the needs of a growing economy and reflect America’s genuine compassion for refugees and asylum seekers. I stand ready to cooperate with anyone who will acknowledge reality and work together in good faith to accomplish that goal.

I want to thank the witnesses here today for their leadership handling the crisis at our southern border, and I particularly want to thank the hardworking men and women of DHS and DOJ, who continue to face an impossible task with compassion and professionalism. I look forward to your testimony.