

Unprecedented Migration at the U.S. Southern Border: Perspectives From the Frontlines”
Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
April 9, 2019

As prepared for delivery:

There is a humanitarian and national security crisis at our southern border. The dedicated men and women of the Border Patrol, Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and Health and Human Services work tirelessly on the frontlines to combat this crisis, but they are overwhelmed. The blame for this rests with Congress, which sits idly by while the crisis grows.

This crisis is unlike anything we have seen before. In the first six months of this fiscal year, Border Patrol apprehended approximately 192,000 family unit aliens and approximately 32,000 unaccompanied children. According to the Department of Homeland Security, we are on track to reach one million apprehensions by the end of the year, the first time in over a decade.

Comparing migration numbers from the last decade to today’s crisis is like comparing apples to oranges. In the past, the vast majority of migrants were single adult males from Mexico, whom the U.S. could remove within hours or days. The migrants crossing today are mostly families and unaccompanied children, and they are likely to remain in the United States for years, or even permanently. Our laws and legal precedents make it extremely difficult to detain and remove children and families who claim asylum, regardless of whether those claims are valid or not. As we heard from witnesses during our hearing last week, we have a virtual open border for families and children, and all of Central America knows it. Border security enforcement has been reduced to a mere speed bump for migrants on their path to long-term occupancy in the United States.

But the consequences of this crisis are not limited to immigration enforcement. Last week, because of the substantial number of families and children streaming into our country, DHS began moving 750 officers off our ports of entry and to the border to help care for and process families. According to Border Patrol Chief Carla Provost, “approximately 40% of manpower [is] dedicated to addressing the humanitarian crisis at the southwest border.” In other words, the agencies charged with securing our borders have been transformed into a humanitarian relief mission. They are doing an admirable job under stressful conditions, but Congress did not establish CBP and Border Patrol to care for children. This reallocation of resources makes our borders and our nation less secure. It slows trade and travel; enriches cartels and human smuggling networks; makes drug smuggling even easier and more lucrative; and encourages others to embark on a dangerous journey to the U.S.

Our compassionate asylum system is being exploited—by economic migrants, drug cartels, human smugglers, and other bad actors—because we do not have the will and skill to fix it. Which means things are likely to get worse. Only Congress can fix this emergency. I reiterate my challenge to my colleagues: If you do not support this new reality of open borders, work with me to fix our flawed immigration system.

This is the second in a series of hearings about the unprecedented crisis at the southern border. Today, we hear perspectives from the frontline efforts to confront this crisis. We would like to welcome our witnesses:

- Rodolfo Karisch, Border Patrol, Chief Patrol Agent for the Rio Grande Valley Sector,
- Randy Howe, Customs and Border Protection, Executive Director for Operations at the Office of Field Operations,
- Timothy Tubbs, Homeland Security Investigations, Deputy Special Agent in Charge – Laredo, TX,
- Greg Cherundolo, Drug Enforcement Agency, Chief of Operations, and
- Commander Jonathan White, Department of Health and Human Services Office of Emergency Management and Medical Operations.

I am grateful to the witnesses for being here.