

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

The Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 18, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

The Committee on Finance is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 18, 2021 at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

The Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 18, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 18, 2021 at 10:15 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

The Committee on the Judiciary is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 18, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing on nominations.

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 18, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

The Special Committee on Aging is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, March 18, 2021, at 9:30 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

ORDERS FOR MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 3 p.m., Monday, March 22; that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and morning business be closed; that upon the conclusion of morning business, the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the nomination of Martin Joseph Walsh to be Secretary of Labor as provided under the previous order; further, that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCHUMER. For the information of Senators, on Monday, after the Senate convenes, we expect to swear in Karen Gibson to be Senate Sergeant at Arms.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous con-

sent that it stand adjourned under the previous order following the remarks of Senator CORNYN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Texas.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, whether the administration wants to call it a challenge or a mess—or pick your word—a calculated word choice does not change the magnitude of what is currently happening on our southern border.

Hundreds of unaccompanied children are being detained on a daily basis, completely overwhelming the capacity of the Border Patrol and Health and Human Services to deal with it—witness the two new centers opened up in Midland, TX, in West Texas, and a new one at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas that will house approximately 300,000 young men.

At one point, there were more than 4,200 children in custody, nearly 3,000 of them held beyond the 72-hour time limit set by the Flores Settlement. For comparison, there were about 2,600 children in custody at any given time during the peak in 2019, so 2,600 now to 4,200.

In many cases, these children don't make the dangerous journey north with their parents but in the care of human smugglers—coyotes, as they are called. Parents pay these smugglers thousands of dollars to bring their children to the United States.

In some cases, along that long, treacherous journey, whether it is from Central America or from Mexico or anywhere else—because these children are not just limited to Mexico and Central America—these children are kidnapped by the smugglers on their way to the border because they know having a child in their custody will give them preferential treatment and allow them to stay in the country. Sadly, we know that, too often, children are mistreated, abused, or even sexually assaulted on the way to the United States.

There is a lot of work that has to be done from the moment the Border Patrol first encounters these children until they are transferred into the custody of Health and Human Services, but the Border Patrol lacks the physical space or the personnel or the resources to provide this number of children with the care and support they need and also to carry out their duties, especially during a deadly pandemic.

On Monday, I spoke with the Border Patrol sector chiefs and the Office of Field Operations Directors from across Texas. We talked about the surge in unaccompanied children and the cascading consequences this crisis has had on our other border missions.

As Border Patrol officers encounter, transport, and care for these children, they are often invariably diverted from their job securing the border, and so security gaps are left along the rest of the border. This is not an accident.

This is really part of the strategy that the human smugglers and drug smugglers have: flood the zone, preoccupy the Border Patrol taking care of children, leaving gaps that can then be exploited, either by more human smugglers or by drug smugglers.

We all know that large amounts of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, fentanyl, and the like come across our southern border. Ninety-two percent, according to the DEA, of all the heroin in the United States comes from Mexico.

So these smugglers and their really criminal organizations that ply in different commodities and different things, they flood the system to distract the Border Patrol and then exploit the vulnerabilities to bring people, drugs, weapons, and money across.

One of the Border Patrol chiefs told me that Customs and Border Protection needs to be able to identify and classify the migrants they meet, and it is being strained, which is impacting national security. For example, last Friday when I was in Carrizo Springs and in Laredo with my friend HENRY CUELLAR, a Democrat representing a border district in Texas along the Rio Grande, the sector chief told us that, just so far this year, migrants from 54 different countries were detained coming across the border in the Del Rio Sector. Now, I think that sort of gives you a better idea that this is not just a localized phenomenon; these are criminal networks with really connections all around the world. If you want to come from Mexico, for example, it will cost you a few thousand bucks. If you want to come from Central America, you pay a little bit more of a premium. If you want to come from Europe or a Middle East country, it will cost you even more. But it is only a matter of money because that is the only thing that these smugglers and these criminal organizations care about.

But then people from 54 different countries, some of which are countries of special interest to the United States for national security purposes—54 countries represented just so far this year in one sector, and I am sure the other Border Patrol sectors have similar stories.

What is more, since October, the Border Patrol has encountered more than 4,000 criminal aliens, nearly double the amount from the previous fiscal year in less than half the time. In order to qualify as a criminal alien, you have committed significant crimes, like assault, battery, domestic violence, sexual offenses, even manslaughter and homicide. Of course, these are just the ones we know about and who were actually detained. Many more—we don't know how many more, but many more get through unobstructed across the border.

While Border Patrol is overwhelmed by the sheer number of people crossing

our border, including the alarming number of children sent by themselves, the Border Patrol isn't able to properly surveil or apprehend potentially dangerous individuals and substances.

We have experienced migration surges in the past, most recently in 2014 when President Obama called it a humanitarian crisis and then again in 2019. We know how dangerous the journey to our border is for migrants, especially children. We know that spring and summer are often the busiest time periods. In other words, what we are seeing now is just a foreshadowing of what we expect to see in the coming weeks and months.

We also know that these criminal organizations pay attention to what our leaders are saying here in the United States. Congressman CUELLAR and I, when we were in Carrizo Springs, were able to talk to a number of young men, teenagers, and asked how they heard about the border and their ability to get across. They said, well, they saw it on TV or heard from family members here in the United States or saw it on social media that now is the time to come, with a new administration that is not committed to border security, and so this was the time to make their run across the border.

But these organizations do pay attention, and unfortunately the actions of the Biden administration not only contributed to another surge this year, but they also made likely that it would be bigger than any other in recent memory.

The President campaigned on policies that would lead to this very outcome. After all, when you send a message that migrants can come to the United States even with the flimsiest asylum claims and stay for years until they are resolved and don't even really have to show up for their court hearing because of the backlog of 1.2 million cases in our immigration courts, what do we expect to happen?

What the Border Patrol tells me is that this is a combination of push factors and pull factors. The push factors we are familiar with. Who wouldn't want to come to the United States for a better life? Who wouldn't want to avoid the violence and crime associated with some of the gang activity in Central America? We all understand that. But the pull factors are the sense that you can actually successfully get into the United States through illegal means or by making a false asylum claim and then overloading the system and basically navigate your way into the United States without any negative consequences.

I believe we need to set up a system that honors and respects all legitimate asylum claims, but this isn't it. We need to find a way to move the children and other people claiming asylum to the head of the line so they can present their claims to an immigration judge. But, as you can imagine, only about 10 to 12 percent of the asylum claims are actually granted, and if your only con-

cern is making it into the United States, maybe you don't want to go in front of an immigration judge. But then again, those who don't, the immigration judge, when their appointed court date comes, issues a default order of deportation. So if you had a valid asylum claim that would have been granted by a judge, you have lost that by virtue of your nonappearance at your hearing.

Well, Secretary Mayorkas said we are on track to see the highest number of border crossings in almost 20 years, and I can't say that I am surprised. There is simply no way to rewind time and prevent this crisis from happening, but it is absolutely urgent first that the administration acknowledge it and then work with Congress to address it.

I would encourage the President to follow his own advice, which is to listen to the experts. The experts I listen to when I travel to the border are Border Patrol, Health and Human Services, and the Office of Refugee Relocation. Those are the three Federal Government Agencies that deal with this crisis. I would be glad to welcome him to my State and introduce him to the dedicated men and women along the border who provide valuable services but who simply are overwhelmed and undersourced.

The communities in which they live along the border are beautiful, vibrant communities with outstanding local leaders, but they also feel like they have been abandoned by the Federal Government. They are the ones who are disproportionately impacted when you see a flood of humanity come through their borders, and they try their best, through nongovernmental organizations or just out of simple human mercy and sympathy for the plight of these migrants, to help them any way they can. But they, too, are overwhelmed. They are doing everything they can to manage the crisis, which they had no hand in creating, and they should not be expected to manage it without help from the Federal Government that is, indeed, responsible for our border.

Law enforcement, mayors, county judges, nongovernmental organizations—I have a long list of folks that I would be happy to share with the administration if they would be willing to listen. Indeed, one of the most significant things I think that President Biden could do, like he did after the polar vortex, the big freeze we had in Texas, the 120-year weather event—he was good enough to come to our State and talk to the first responders. I think he would benefit greatly if he made another trip on Air Force One down to the border so he could do what I have had the opportunity to do, and that is to talk to the experts and the people on the ground who understand this crisis and who have some, I think, very constructive ideas about how to deal with it.

REMEMBERING ROGER SOFER

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, on another matter, nearly 20 years ago, I took my first trip to Israel. I had a good stroke of fortune: I met a brilliant, hilarious, opinionated, larger-than-life man named Roger Sofer. Roger was simply unlike anyone I had ever met before or anyone I have met since. He could captivate a room with anything from a serious discussion of national security and Israel-U.S. policies, to stories from his childhood, to jokes that, well, probably shouldn't be repeated here on the Senate floor.

Roger cared deeply about his family, his Jewish faith, and the many friends he earned throughout his life. I consider myself fortunate to be among those friends, and I would like just to share a few words about my friend Roger, who passed away last week.

As the old saying goes in my State, Roger wasn't born in Texas, but he got there as fast as he could. The incredible story of his life began in Queens, NY. It led him to the University of Tampa on a baseball scholarship as a left-handed pitcher and then to Fort Dix with the Army. He then went back to Florida, where he worked as a cabdriver, home to New York as a sales representative, and then finally to Houston, TX, where he lived when he and I met.

Clearly, young Roger was an enterprising guy. He understood the value of hard work, and even more importantly, he learned about the value of relationships. Roger and his friend Dan Steiner started their own financial planning and insurance firm and quickly found success.

Roger truly cared about everyone he worked with—his clients, his employees, and their families.

That personal attention translated into a thriving business and a lot of rewards in recognition to go along with it. But Roger never let work consume his entire life or take away from the people and causes he cared most about.

Roger grew up in a religious home and inherited a deep appreciation of his Jewish faith. His father Hyman was his hero and instilled in him a love of our country, as well as a love of Israel. Hyman would say, "Don't worry about business, Roger, because if there's no Israel, there will be no business." That thought stuck. Throughout his life, Roger fought to secure a brighter future for our friends and allies in Israel.

In the 1980s, Melvin Dow and Stanford Alexander, two giants in the AIPAC community—the American Israel Public Affairs Committee—asked Roger to help grow the pro-Israel committee in Houston. Well, I know Roger never did anything halfway; he poured his heart and his soul into outreach efforts. When you have somebody as outgoing, passionate, and likable as Roger, you are bound to get results.

Roger's work in Houston was so successful that in 2002 he was asked to serve on AIPAC's National Board, a position he would hold for nearly two