

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Ranking Member Jamie Raskin Opening Statement Hearing “On The Front Lines of the Border Crisis: A Hearing With Chief Patrol Agents” February 7, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Comer, and thanks to the witnesses for your service and for being with us here today.

**The purpose of oversight is to collect facts and evidence that will allow us to legislate intelligently and effectively to promote the common welfare and solve the nation’s problems. Today, we are looking at the border, but the Majority has offered us no fact-based clarity as to what their solutions are to address what they believe to be the problem with immigration and the border.**

The existence of a border is not in itself problematic and never has been. Neither is immigration to America a problem for we are an immigrant society; except for the descendants of slaves brought here involuntarily or Native Americans who have been here for millennia, we are all descendants of immigrants.

People have wanted to come here as long as the nation, or the idea of the nation, has existed—for we are a land premised on opportunity and freedom and dedicated to the proposition that all men and women are created equal.

When Tom Paine got over here two years before the American Revolution, he fell in love with the promise of America. He said it would become an “asylum to humanity”—not an insane asylum, mind you, but a place of refuge for people fleeing religious, political and economic persecution.

The traditional interest in coming to America has spread, deepened and intensified recently as political democracy, civil freedom, basic public safety and meaningful economic opportunity have come under ferocious attack and pressure in nations in our hemisphere like Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, and Nicaragua.

**Our basic problem is a political one: legal channels of immigration have been choked off in the wake of Congressional failure to act in bipartisan fashion on immigration policy.** That is despite the fact that we badly need workers in many sectors and many parts of the country to fill the jobs that drive our economy.

**Under President Biden’s economic boom, we are seeing record employment growth and the lowest unemployment rate in more than a half-century.** Since President Biden came into office, America has created millions and millions of new jobs. **Multiple [reports](#) suggest that creating new legal pathways to citizenship would only enhance our current economic progress by increasing the GDP by up to \$1.7 trillion over the next ten years, raising wages for all Americans, and creating hundreds of thousands more new jobs.**

But this will not be possible without comprehensive immigration reform embodying the kind of progress that the Biden-Harris Administration and Congressional Democrats have been fighting for.

**The political problem on Capitol Hill is that when it comes to working out balanced, common-sense immigration policy solutions, Republicans driven by the MAGA wing have been systematically thwarting and derailing comprehensive efforts to improve America's immigration system and strengthen border enforcement for years.**

In 2007, Republicans blocked bipartisan legislation which would have significantly increased border enforcement capacity and provided legal status and a path to citizenship for the approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States. In 2013, when Senate Democrats and Republicans again came together to pass a strong comprehensive immigration reform plan that would have provided unprecedented resources for border security—including 40,000 additional Border Patrol agents—and created a pathway to citizenship for millions of undocumented workers, the Republican-controlled House threw a monkey wrench into the bipartisan collaboration and refused to hold a vote.

Since then, **Democrats have repeatedly developed, proposed and sometimes passed pragmatic legislative solutions to address border security while providing practical pathways to citizenship for people like the DREAMERS, hundreds of thousands of young people brought to America in childhood who are now productively engaged in work, military service, or school. Such proposals include the parole program that President Biden implemented last month, which has reduced unlawful entries and cut border apprehensions of Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans by 97 percent. We have proposed aggressive coordination with our international allies to block the flow into our country of fentanyl carried by criminals, most of whom are American citizens. We have advanced policies to promote sustained economic growth and political stability throughout Latin America so that desperate people and families don't need to migrate to the southern border in search of a future safe from violent gangs, authoritarian governments, and grinding poverty.**

The facts show that, under President Biden's leadership, investment in border security has also increased. In December, Democrats bolstered border security by sending billions of dollars to CBP and Border Patrol, including money to hire 300 additional Border Patrol agents, millions of dollars to provide more personnel to our ports of entry, and over \$200 million for between-the-ports technology to detect drug smugglers and human traffickers.

**Yet, rather than work with Democrats on these efforts, the extreme MAGA forces in the Republican party have chosen to abandon the pro-immigration stance of Abraham Lincoln and Ronald Reagan and instead spread fear about a "foreign invasion," paranoia about the racist and antisemitic "Great Replacement" mythology, and disinformation about fentanyl—the vast majority of which is brought into our country by American smugglers working for the international drug cartels and traveling through lawful ports of entry. The radical distortions about immigration, Great Replacement and who is bringing fentanyl into our country may work to rev up the MAGA base but they do nothing to solve our real-world problems.**

**The flagship MAGA-driven Republican proposal, H.R. 29, the so-called "Border Safety and Security Act," would effectively end the asylum program in America. That's not consistent with the founding values of our nation or the law today, which rejects the idea of returning people who have a well-founded fear of persecution by an authoritarian government back into the jaws of their oppressors. H.R. 29 is so extreme and radical that some of our Republican colleagues not associated with MAGA are refusing to support it. One House Republican recently called it quote, "anti-American" and quote, "un-Christian."**

Mr. Chairman, there are many things we can do to improve our immigration laws and border enforcement if we set aside all the myths, disinformation and partisan distortions. **My colleagues and I ardently hope today's hearing will become a chance to search for bipartisan agreement rather than another missed opportunity**

**by Committee Republicans to join with us in conducting meaningful oversight as part of comprehensive immigration reform.**

**Turning this into more bad political theater will just extend the long pattern of failure on this question. For years, Republicans on this Committee refused to conduct oversight of President Trump's disastrous and unspeakably cruel border policies. They were silent in 2019 when the U.S. Customs and Border Protection declared a humanitarian crisis at the border. They refused to join with Committee Democrats in opposing Orwellian policies that ripped thousands of little children from the arms of their parents and sent them away to vanish into a Kafkaesque bureaucracy.**

**Some may wish we would forget one of the grimmest chapters of any American presidency, but people will not be fooled when MAGA Republicans pretend to cry foul over Secretary Mayorkas' and President Biden's strong and decisive actions today to impose order at the border while defending America's deepest values. But it doesn't have to be that way. Let's act together in good faith now to pass comprehensive reforms to improve our immigration system at all levels.** We are a nation of immigrants and we are a nation of laws, and we can live up to all of our values in this challenge. I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses and thoughts of our colleagues.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

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