

**“The Biden Administration’s Regulatory and Policymaking Efforts to
Undermine U.S. Immigration Law”
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
10:00 AM, Wednesday, January 17, 2024
Statement for the Record
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)**

During today’s hearing, you will witness House Republicans clamoring over each other to blame President Joe Biden for the situation at the border. If you were to believe them, you would think they slept through the four years of chaos that defined the Trump Administration and share absolutely no blame in the current predicament at the southern border. But that is a fantasy, and one that Republicans rely on to deflect responsibility for an issue of their own making.

So let me set the record straight: Republicans have no solution to the border.

Republicans are trying to defend their decision to leave our allies high and dry, by freezing tens of billions of dollars of global security aid, in the name of a border deal. But then in the same breath, they are publicly admitting their intention to sabotage immigration reform legislation for fear it could help President Joe Biden’s poll numbers. Hypocrisy could not be clearer. At best, Republicans believe that a broken immigration system and chaos at the southern border suits their political needs. At worst, they echo Donald Trump’s belief that immigrants are “poisoning the blood” of our country, a direct invocation of Adolf Hitler.

Time and time again Republicans have walked away from compromise on immigration to instead shut down the government, withhold desperately needed security funding while our allies are fighting and dying, and even leave our troops high and dry. Representative Troy Nehls best represented the Republican strategy when he said, “Let me tell you, I’m not willing to do too damn much right now to help a Democrat and to help Joe Biden’s approval rating.” Speaker Mike Johnson just this week echoed Representative Nehls when he said Congress can’t solve the crisis at the border until Donald Trump or another Republican is in the White House. I thought this was a crisis. Republicans, cynically, have once again threatened to shut down the government until Congress passes H.R.2, hardline legislation that would codify the misguided policies of the Trump administration that did nothing to stem migration flows in the Western Hemisphere.

It's important to remember that Donald Trump won the Republican nomination for President in 2016 on the premise that he would build a “big, beautiful wall” along the southern border, and it would be Mexico, not the American taxpayer, that would pay for it. Not only did the Trump administration shut down the government and raid funding for drug interdiction, military construction, and Customs and Border Protection to the tune of \$15 billion, but Mexico didn’t pay a peso for the 40-mile-long wall. A length I might add, that only spans an infinitesimal amount of our 1,933-mile border with Mexico. Shamelessly, H.R. 2 includes an appropriation of \$2.4 billion for a physical border wall, a failed strategy that we now know will not stem migration flows.

Republicans hold the belief that deterrence is the only way to stop migrants from coming northward. But after the Trump Administration cut off legal pathways to citizenship and enacted the cruel “zero tolerance” policy separating children from their families, migrant apprehensions at the southern border increased. In fact, the number of migrant apprehensions at the U.S.-Mexico border rose in fiscal year 2019 to its highest annual level in 12 years, more than doubling fiscal year 2018. Migrants and refugees leave their homes because of gang violence or economic desperation, not because they want to leave their families and communities. Deterrence didn’t work under the Trump administration, and Republicans by presenting deterrence as the only solution, are refusing to learn from their own record.

Republicans blocked comprehensive immigration reform even before Trump took office. Time and again, Democrats have proposed solutions to fix the immigration system in a reasonable, humane way. And time and again, Republicans have opposed these efforts at every turn. One might recall that in 2013, House Republicans thwarted comprehensive immigration reform after an agreement was reached in the Senate. Many of those same House Republicans who prevented that legislation from passing are now intent on blaming irregular migration solely on the Biden administration.

When Democrats controlled Congress, we delivered the FY23 government funding package to President Biden’s desk with almost no help from any Republicans despite including \$7.153 billion of appropriations for Border Patrol - a 17 percent increase from the year before. 93.89% of the Republican Conference voted against providing \$65 million for 300 new Border Patrol agents; \$60 million for 125 new personnel at points of entry; and \$230 million for technology like autonomous surveillance towers.

Today, Republicans will offer hollow slogans: “Close the border!” “Build the Wall!” “Impeach Mayorkas!” but no solutions.

Democrats, on the other hand, understand what immigration means to our country. It is an important part of our national history. It is a value we hold dear. It is an engine that powers our economic might. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) found that comprehensive immigration reform would have saved the country \$175 billion over the 2014–2023 period and decreased federal budget deficits by about \$700 billion over the 2024–2033 period. Experts have warned that closing the border would cost the U.S. billions of dollars in trade. Labor shortages plague small businesses, manufacturing, and companies across the country, yet Republicans have chosen to weaponize immigration instead of harnessing it to create opportunity and economic growth.

The situation at the border demands serious policy solutions that provide a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients, address the root causes of migration like repression, political instability, violence, hunger, and lack of economic opportunity and fix our own, broken immigration system. There are humane workable solutions to the challenge of migrants coming to the border that we can pursue on a bipartisan basis and a failure to do so is not just a political, but a moral failing. Despite Republican obstruction, we must find a way to reform our immigration system.