

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of**

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Ranking Member Kathy Castor

***Hearing on “Threat to Every Community: Assessing the Safety, Health, and Economic
Consequences of President Biden’s Border Policies”***

January 17, 2024

America is not alone in grappling with the challenges of immigration caused by violence and oppression in migrant’s home countries, overseas wars, or impacts of climate crisis. These drivers are forcing millions of people to search for greater safety and stability for their families. Congress has a responsibility to update our laws, but has failed to do so for many years. We are spending billions of dollars at the border, but unless we can come together with bipartisan solutions, we will continue to grapple with similar challenges.

Across America there is a lot of bipartisan agreement on creating tough but fair pathways to citizenship, which will discourage migrant families from making the dangerous journey through the Darien Gap, and target human traffickers who lure innocent migrants with misinformation and false hope.

Migrants continue to face unchecked abuses by criminal groups, rampant sexual violence, a cascade of physical and mental health impacts, and worse.

This past weekend, Mexican authorities recovered the bodies of a woman and two children who drowned in the Rio Grande while trying to enter the United States. Federal agents had learned there were migrants in distress, and asked Texas officials for access to provide aid, but they were refused.

These tragic and inhumane deaths are not isolated incidents as the International Organization for Migration documented 686 deaths and disappearances across the US-Mexico border in 2022.

Reforming our outdated immigration system would decrease the number of desperate people coming to the southern border and bolster our national security by allowing border patrol agents to focus on true threats.

I have witnessed the benefit of the Biden Administration’s new parole initiative for migrants from Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Haiti who apply outside of the United States and meet strict requirements to come to our country on parole. This is an example of using the limited tools the administration has at its disposal to humanely and justly address the crisis, but Republicans don’t seem interested.

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They have refused to give the Administration the resources it needs, held funding of the federal government hostage, and demanded support for their cruel and costly immigration package at the cost of getting real work done.

This Subcommittee held a hearing with Secretary Becerra after reports emerged about widespread exploitation of undocumented children in factories across the U.S. Instead of addressing these appalling episodes of child exploitation, Republicans are pushing budgets that would slash resources for the very offices tasked with protecting children from this abuse.

Similarly, we need bipartisan support for prevention and treatment to cut demand and help Americans struggling with addiction to combat deadly illicit fentanyl.

But Republicans continue to ignore the facts by incorrectly linking illicit fentanyl trafficking with undocumented immigration. Less than one tenth of one percent of people who cross the border illegally possess any fentanyl whatsoever.

We have a labor shortage across the entire workforce - doctors, nurses, home health care, hospitality, construction, engineering, education. And it is apparent that America needs immigrants to reach our economic potential. Republicans should recognize and celebrate immigrants' countless contributions to our workforce rather than demean immigrants as burdens.

For example, 25% of recent US start-ups are created by immigrants.

We have important work to do on Energy and Commerce: strengthening our pandemic preparedness, addressing drug shortages, reducing climate pollution, protecting our privacy - to name a few. Let's get back to the real work of effective governing rather than continue to engage in political theater.

Thank you and I yield back.