

Russ Fulcher
Idaho, District 1

Thank you Mr./Ms. Chairman,

I come before you today to support the American people who have been devastated by drug and human trafficking across our southern border. According to the Congressional Research Service, an estimated 65% of illicit drugs seized in America between 2014 and 2018, were seized at our southern border. Most commonly: Marijuana, Cocaine, Heroin, Methamphetamine, and Opioids with large quantities of Fentanyl. In 2019 alone, border patrol agents seized more than 2,545 pounds of fentanyl. That's enough to give every American a lethal overdose. And traffic is increasing. With the exception of marijuana, there were more seizures of every other drug in 2019 than the previous five years combined.

Last week, I and several other members personally toured the Arizona border area. We met with private land owners and local, federal and tribal law enforcement. It is blatantly obvious that traffickers (sometimes called "mules" or "coyotes") find weaknesses in border security regions and exploit them; and in so doing, they trigger a massive increase in crime, human suffering, expense of US taxpayer dollars, and yes, death... a lot of it.

Although the motivations for people wishing to cross into the U.S. could be varied and complicated, a large part of the solution is not. Build a wall. Is it the only solution? No, but it's a darn good start, and where we already have it in place, it's a game-changer.

For the same reason we lock our doors at night, have security systems, or perhaps a fence around our subdivisions homes, it is imperative that we take similar precautions for the Americans we are responsible for protecting. Portions of the region we toured (such as Nogales) have a wall. Other portions do not. Not surprisingly, the traffic heavily skews to the regions where there are poor or no barriers. Spent water bottles, carpet shoe coverings, and empty backpacks provide plenty of evidence where the illicit activities occur.

Prior to last week, I relied on someone else to inform me as to what is happening on our southern border. But last week I saw it myself, and virtually every stakeholder that I spoke with living and/or working in border regions told me the same thing: Sometime in the 1990's things changed. Illicit cartels grew in prominence and activity. So much so that today they often "manage" the Mexican side of the border. They're there to make money, and they don't care how they do it or who gets hurt in the process. My perception was that they just trafficked drugs. But I learned it is much more than that. For example, cartel personnel will intercept migrants heading to our border and extort money from them, promising "safe passage" into America; often lying to them by telling them their desired destination (such as New York or Kansas City) is "just over that ridge". They kidnap women and girls, then sell them into the sex trade. Older people and children are used repeatedly... often as decoys to distract authorities away from cartel activities.

As far as I'm concerned these people are the scum of the earth, and we have a responsibility to protect our citizens and those they prey upon. But, we must understand that they are well-financed and well-armed. Local, federal, and tribal law enforcement all agree that they are armed and financed comparably to Mexican military forces, and their tactics of extortion and bribery have created an environment where it's very difficult to know who one can trust. Native American families are often confronted by cartel "scouts" and given an ultimatum... help get their contraband (human or otherwise) into the US and get paid for it, or face losing their spouse, children, or even their own lives. Mexican and American law enforcement personnel face threats such as: "... don't show up for your next wok shift, or you'll never see your daughter again."

I encourage you to do what I did. Go look for yourself. I believe any objective person will come to the same conclusions that I have. Physical border security is foundationally critical, and in the best long term interest of everyone. And please keep in mind, the nefarious actors triggering so much suffering in these regions don't give a rip about the American people or what party controls the US congress. They just want to make money and they don't care who they hurt to do it.

The elephant the room (pun accepted), is the notion that congressional republicans don't have enough "compassion" for immigrants and that democrats want high immigration numbers because that eventually tends to translate into more democrat votes. What you choose to believe is up to you, but as members of congress my request to all of you today is to put all of that aside and look at the facts. Porous borders come with a very high cost, be it in fiscal terms, breeched security or in terms of human suffering. Only bad actors get rewarded. A border wall gives us a fighting chance to simply insert some control into the situation. And without some degree of control, policies really don't matter much. Please join me in supporting the American people, current and future, with the appropriation necessary for a border wall.

In closing, I offer acknowledgement and thanks to the law enforcement officials and ranch families we met along the border. To Sheriff Mark Lamb and the many hardworking border police and agents: You are heroes.

I yield back.