

U.S. Sen. Johnson: Failed immigration policy sustains a lawless cartel empire

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), the chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, today published an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal calling on Congress to fix the failed immigration policies that have created a crisis at our southern border and a new business model for Mexican cartels:

Failed Immigration Policy Sustains a Lawless Cartel Empire

Sen. Ron Johnson, Wall Street Journal

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/failed-immigration-policy-sustains-a-lawless-cartel-empire-11556232571?shareToken=stf25aa17c3b60439c88098023f5af640a>

In a 2018 Gallup poll, 158 million adults world-wide, including 42 million from Latin America, named the U.S. as their desired future residence. That's almost half our current population of 325 million. We simply cannot accommodate all those would-be immigrants.

Whether it's called an emergency, a crisis or something else, the surge of families and children entering illegally through our southern border is out of control. Since 2012, some 900,000 unaccompanied children and people traveling in families have entered illegally or without proper documentation. In March alone, the number was 66,000.

Americans naturally have great sympathy for anyone fleeing violence or economic hardship for the hope and promise that the U.S. offers. That we're a nation of immigrants—natural risk-takers—has made us the envy of the world. But immigration has to be a legal and controlled process.

The generally accepted best estimate of the undocumented population in the U.S. is somewhere between 11 million and 12 million. Using a different method, Yale researchers estimated somewhere between 16 million and 29 million. No one really knows.

Having that many people living in the shadows is not good for anyone. Illegal immigrants can be exploited by unscrupulous employers, depressing wages and working conditions for the legal population. Children born to illegal aliens are U.S. citizens, creating another impossible enforcement issue. Human traffickers—some of the most evil people on the planet—extort their “clients” into forms of involuntary servitude, including sex trafficking.

Among the many reasons the border remains unsecured, America's insatiable demand for drugs stands out. Cartels have established sophisticated trafficking operations and routes across the U.S.-Mexico border. Fortunes have flowed into cartels' coffers, weakening the rule of law south of our border.

Because our immigration laws are easy to exploit, cartels have expanded into human trafficking and discovered that it is not only very profitable but entails less risk and less work. They deliver their “cargo” to the border near a Border Patrol station. The immigrants cross on their own, increasingly in larger groups, and the U.S. government and nongovernmental organizations do the rest.

It's important to understand that the southern border is secure—on the Mexican side. It's controlled by cartels with the acquiescence, if not outright help and support, of some Mexican officials. No one crosses the border without paying their fees.

Cartels are pocketing hundreds of millions of dollars, if not more, for their transportation system through Mexico. America's broken immigration system—our laws and legal loopholes—sustains this wicked business model. Our laws must change.

Congress should focus on solving a specific problem: the increasing number of unaccompanied minors and people traveling in families who flow in without a valid asylum claim. In fiscal 2018 only 13.5% of asylum claims made by those from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras—the substantial majority of people crossing our southern border—were granted once fully adjudicated. Yet we allow 75% of those claiming credible fear to enter the U.S. and avail themselves of the full, multiyear judicial process. Because ill-conceived laws and a lack of personnel and facilities prevent the government from detaining unaccompanied minors and families, most of the 900,000 who have arrived since 2012 have dispersed all over the U.S. There is no central database tracking them.

As a result, only 7% of those who aren't detained but whose claims have been denied are actually sent home. The reality since 2012 is that if you come into the U.S. as an unaccompanied minor or member of a family and you claim asylum, you will probably be able to stay indefinitely. This creates a huge incentive for more people to come—hence the growing crisis.

The achievable goal of legislation should be to reduce the flow of people entering illegally without a valid asylum claim. In 2005, 31,000 Brazilians were apprehended entering the U.S. illegally through Mexico. The Bush administration used a process of expedited removal for those without a valid asylum claim and worked with Mexican authorities to prevent further entries. Within two months, the number of migrants fell by 90%. Only 1,400 Brazilians were apprehended in 2006.

In 2014 President Obama declared it a humanitarian crisis when 120,000

unaccompanied minors and people traveling in families entered illegally. Without separating families, his administration began detaining and removing those without valid asylum claims. The number dropped to 68,000 in 2015.

As these examples show, the solution is to determine quickly and more accurately who clearly does not have a valid asylum claim and safely return them home. Once illegal immigrants realize we will not allow our laws to be exploited, fewer will risk paying human traffickers, and the flow will be reduced.