

U.S. Moves to Stop Surge in Illegal Immigration

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JUNE 20, 2014

McALLEN, Tex. — White House officials, saying that misinformation about administration policies helped drive a surge of illegal migrants from Central America across the South Texas border, on Friday announced plans to detain more of them and to accelerate their court cases so as to deport them more quickly.

In tandem with those measures, Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. met in Guatemala on Friday with senior leaders of the three countries where most of the migrants come from — El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras — to secure their help in conveying the message that there are no new legal channels to come to the United States and that those crossing illegally will be deported.

Immigration officers and judges will be reassigned on an emergency basis to speed cases in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, where most of the migrants are entering illegally.

The administration is trying to quell rampant rumors reaching Central America that American border authorities are offering entry permits to parents traveling with young children after they are caught. Officials hope that by increasing the numbers of migrants who are detained and then deported, others considering the trek will be dissuaded from doing so.

Mr. Biden announced \$255 million for Central America to assist repatriation programs for deportees, improve prosecution of criminal street gang members, and expand youth programs to reduce gang recruitment.

Until now, White House officials have insisted that extreme poverty and an epidemic of gang violence in those Central American countries were the main causes of the unanticipated spike in illegal migration.

But many migrants told Border Patrol agents they decided to set out for the United States after hearing that it was offering some kind of entry permit. Many other migrants who asked for asylum after being apprehended have been allowed to stay temporarily, further fueling hopes that Central American women and children were receiving special treatment.

On a conference call with reporters, Cecilia Muñoz, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, said the administration was moving to “push back” on “misinformation that is being deliberately planted by criminal organizations, by smuggling networks, about what people can expect if they come to the United States.”

In Guatemala, Mr. Biden met with that country's president, Otto Pérez Molina; the president of El Salvador, Salvador Sánchez Cerén; and senior officials from Honduras and Mexico. But Mr. Biden got a taste of the disconnect the United States often has with regional leaders, who fault the failure of American immigration policy for driving children to join their parents in the United States no matter the cost. In his public remarks, Mr. Pérez Molina, while recognizing that the American Congress has to act, reiterated a request for a temporary worker program and a way for Guatemalans living in the United States illegally to be able to stay.

Mr. Biden ignored those points in his comments and emphasized the social causes of the migration.

“The United States recognizes that a key part of the solution to this problem is to address the root causes of this immigration in the first place,” he said, turning to address Mr. Pérez Molina directly several times. “Especially poverty, insecurity and the lack of the rule of law, so the people can stay and thrive in their own communities, so a parent doesn't feel so desperate that they put their child in the hands of a criminal network and say take him, and take her to the United States.”

The Honduran president, Juan Orlando Hernández, sent a top aide to the meeting but skipped it himself in order to watch Honduras play in the World Cup in Brazil. Tension with Honduras has been growing over public complaints by Mr. Hernández regarding what he sees as a lack of American will to help stem the violence from a drug war he believes American consumption habits have caused.

Mr. Hernández's absence drew an unusually blunt rebuke from the American ambassador on a Honduran radio program. “I know he is in Brazil, and today there is a very important game, but the country has priorities for which the top leader should be present,” said the ambassador, Lisa J. Kubiske.

The new American funding includes \$40 million over five years for Guatemala to improve neighborhood security programs, \$25 million over five years for El Salvador to open 77 youth centers offering alternatives to joining gangs for teenagers and \$18.5 million for Honduras for police training.

Since 2008, the administration has designated \$642 million for anticrime aid to the region, but congressional watchdogs have complained that a lack of transparency on the spending has made measuring results difficult.

In Washington, the House speaker, John A. Boehner, Republican of Ohio, sent a letter to President Obama on Friday urging him to send the National Guard to reinforce the Southwest border and help protect migrant children, saying their safety was “a matter of paramount importance.”

Mr. Boehner blamed the administration for the surge. “The policies of your administration have directly resulted in the belief by these immigrants that once they reach U.S. soil, they will be able to stay here indefinitely,” he wrote.

The sharp increase of illegal migrants includes more than 52,000 minors caught at the border since October without their parents. Mr. Obama, saying the surge is a humanitarian crisis, has ordered the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate an effort to maintain detention shelters for them and help reunite them with relatives in this country.

Border authorities have also apprehended more than 39,000 adults with children since October, a record number.

Since there are no detention facilities for families in the Rio Grande Valley, the Border Patrol has been releasing them without bond, giving them only an order to appear in immigration court for deportation hearings and allowing them to travel to relatives living in the United States.

Migrants have been confusing the notice to appear in court — the immigration equivalent of an indictment — with a permit to stay and have sent word to Central America that they received permits to remain here, prompting more to embark on the journey across Mexico.

Officials said they would open more detention centers as soon as they could find buildings that met federal requirements for detaining children.

The administration is also sending more immigration officers who specialize in asylum cases to the Rio Grande Valley to make quicker initial determinations on whether migrants are fleeing persecution and might be eligible for protection here. Immigration judges will be reassigned on an emergency basis to hear asylum petitions and other cases of migrants in detention, Justice Department officials said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/21/us/us-plans-to-step-up-detention-and-deportation-of-migrants.html>