

# DAILY NEWS

## Trump just doesn't understand the border: Here are the facts

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President Trump took to television on Tuesday to make his case that the lack of a border wall has caused a “crisis.” Drugs, terrorism, crime and the illegal immigration of children all featured prominently as supposed justifications for spending billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars on the project. Yet upon close examination, the President’s justifications fall flat. The border has problems, but the President doesn’t understand them, and some of them he has caused himself.

The President cited stopping drug smuggling as a primary goal of his border barrier. Far from a crisis, however, the value of drug seizures by the average Border Patrol agent actually declined 70% since 2013. That’s because marijuana is the primary drug smuggled between ports of entry, where a border wall would go, and marijuana has been legalized in so many states that demand is being filled domestically.

While Trump acted as if the absence of a border wall were the primary cause of the opioid crisis, the average inspector at ports of entry in 2018 seized eight times more cocaine, 17 times more fentanyl, 23 times more methamphetamine and 36 times more heroin than the average Border Patrol agent seized at the physical border in early 2018. The hard drugs that Trump claims to care about aren’t coming where Trump thinks they are.

As importantly, building hundreds of miles of border fence from 2005 to 2009 did nothing to deter smuggling between ports of entry anyway. The average Border Patrol agent was seizing the same quantity of marijuana after the current fences went up as before. When marijuana was legalized in several states starting in 2014, marijuana seizures suddenly dropped 78% — legalization, not the wall, stopped the narcotraffickers.

The President could not help but raise the specter of terrorists crossing illegally. The fact is that a foreign terrorist has not carried out a single terrorist attack in more than four decades after crossing the border illegally. Trump officials have cited a number of “special interest aliens” whom Border Patrol apprehended, but those aren’t terrorists — they are just people who come from “countries of interest.” They could be a family fleeing terrorists, like the Syrian Christians who showed up at the border in 2015.

It would not be a “security crisis” without numerous “criminals and gangs.” Yet Border Patrol figures show that the agency arrested less than 1,000 border crossers who had convictions for violent crimes. That’s just 0.2% of total apprehensions. A majority of the “criminals” in 2018 were people convicted of, not surprisingly, crossing illegally. Trump claimed thousands of suspected gang members were caught crossing illegally, but again, the real number in 2018 was just 728.

The fact is that the vast majority of immigrants crossing the borders of the United States legally or otherwise are simply peaceful people seeking the American dream. That's why, based on figures from the Census Bureau, immigrants — legal and illegal — are half as likely as natural-born Americans to be behind bars in America.

Trump struck a compassionate tone when he spoke about children who make the dangerous journey to this country. But his policies — and the current border fence — have only hurt them. As Border Patrol and the border fences pushed more and more immigrants to cross in remote areas of the border — in deserts, mountains and rivers — the journeys grew more perilous and more people died.

In 1998, Border Patrol found one dead migrant for every 5,767 apprehensions, but after building the fences and doubling its force, it found one dead migrant for every 1,034 apprehensions in 2017. That's a sign that the journey is now about 5 times more dangerous. In addition, the remoteness of the locations where they were apprehended contributed to the deaths of both children who died in Border Patrol custody in recent weeks, as it was more difficult for them to get help.

Trump is making matters worse. His administration has institutionalized a practice of capping the number of people who can apply for asylum at legal ports of entry. This forces them to either live homeless and starving in dangerous cities in Mexico for months, or enter illegally. This choice is what is driving women and children into the hands of smugglers and leading them to cross illegally.

The administration says it doesn't have the resources to process families at ports, but somehow Border Patrol has the resources to process five times as many families that it apprehends between ports. At a minimum, the port inspectors could turn the families over to Border Patrol, maintaining a safe and orderly flow.

The problem is that the Trump administration doesn't want *any* flow, even a legal one. As Trump has said, "I don't want them in our country." But that's not a solution. Trump's policies have created a real problem, but his border wall is not the fix the system needs. America needs to overhaul its outdated immigration system.

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