

WORLD

The border under Biden

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3/10/21

IMMIGRATION | A migration surge threatens to create another humanitarian crisis

President Joe Biden campaigned on a promise to reverse Trump-era immigration policies, but the changes he is making could land the country back in the same chaotic situation as when his predecessor took office.

The first few months of 2021 have brought migrants surging to the southern border in hopes of a warmer reception under the Biden administration. On March 8, The New York Times reported that the number of migrant children the government had detained at the southern border tripled in the past two weeks. The government is holding more than 3,250 children, and more than 1,360 of those have been in custody longer than the legal 72-hour limit. Many of the children are staying in shelters intended to hold adults for just a few hours. Overcrowding and poor conditions in those shelters brought heavy criticism to Customs and Border Protection in 2018.

Under current pandemic protocols, Border Patrol is turning away families that cross the border. Migrant parents choose between keeping their family together or sending their children to the border alone.

The law requires Border Patrol, which falls under the Department of Homeland Security, to take unaccompanied minors into custody and transfer them within three days to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services. ORR must then place the children with a sponsor, usually a relative. The rapid arrival of migrants has exacerbated the challenges of coordinating between these agencies within the prescribed time frame. The Times reported that in January, border agents encountered migrants at the border approximately 78,000 times—more than any January in 10 years. Over the weekend, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott announced he was deploying the National Guard to try to stop drug cartels and human traffickers who would take advantage of overtaxed border security.

Since taking office, Biden has stopped border wall construction and appointed a task force to help reunite families separated at the border. He ordered the Department of Homeland Security to review all immigration enforcement policies and make recommendations for improving them. But the surge of migrants is forcing the administration to focus on immediate needs: It reopened a controversial overflow facility that Trump closed, and officials plan to convert Texas family detention centers into “rapid processing hubs” to move migrants through in 72 hours.

David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, told WWL-AM that “it sounds like their policy is eventually going to wind up being similar to Obama’s policy, which was chaotic, to say the least.”