



Justice doubles down on political stunt at border

July 25, 2023

Gov. Jim Justice announced Monday on Twitter that West Virginia is doing its part to help with the country's southern border (or "Biden Border Crisis," as he called it) by sending National Guard troops to provide support. It's a pure political stunt that doubles down on a previous pure political stunt.

First off, Justice made the announcement from his U.S. Senate campaign account, not from his governor's account. That in itself shows this is blatantly political and not a matter of actual policy. Also, no announcement of any new Guard deployments to the border has been made, so Justice must be referring to his authorization to send 50 troops to Texas back on May 31. If that's the case, it's intentionally misleading.

Reasons abound regarding why sending West Virginia National Guard troops roughly 1,500 miles from West Virginia is a bad idea. In theory, the troops are there to help bolster forces in stemming the tide of illegal immigration into the United States. On top of the basic issue of entering the country illegally, the fentanyl trade, human trafficking and (if one takes the bogus claims of some alarmist politicians at face value) terrorists are tacked onto the situation.

Illegal border crossings are dangerous, no question, especially when those leading a group have ulterior motives. But the idea that the United States has "open borders" that allow people to come and go while committing crimes is absurd.

According to the conservative-leaning Cato Institute, the United States has some of the strictest border policies in the world, and entering legally is very difficult, which contributes to illegal immigration. Even so, illegal immigration is just as hard and much more dangerous. The institute also found that immigrants generally assimilate into American culture easily, pay their fair share of taxes, are less reliant on welfare than Americans and -- whether entering legally or illegally -- are less likely to be incarcerated or commit a crime than native-born U.S. citizens.

As for drug trafficking, according to a study by the Cato Institute released last year, most of the fentanyl distributed in the United States comes in from legal points of entry. More than 90% of fentanyl confiscated by border authorities is discovered at legal crossings or vehicle checkpoints. Indeed, U.S. citizens are generally the best drug smugglers, because they're less likely to be rigorously searched, according to the institute. About 99% of fentanyl users are U.S. citizens, and immigrants are 80% less likely to use the drug.

Illegal immigration at the southern border also happens to be down by about 70% since Title 42 restrictions enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic were lifted in May, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

So, if it's the same 50 Guardsmen or Justice is talking about sending more, exactly what are they supposed to be doing about illegal immigration?

Of course, the main strike against sending Guard members anywhere is that Justice mobilized them last year under a state of emergency to shore up critical staffing shortages at West Virginia correctional facilities. The Guard is still on the job at overcrowded jails and prisons, some of which have staffing shortages as high as 76%. Why send Guard members elsewhere when a crisis at home is far from over?

The answer, of course, is political expediency. Judging by the numerous, harshly critical responses Justice's announcement received, most West Virginians aren't buying it.