

## Parson sending Missouri National Guard, Highway Patrol to Aid Texas Border Operation

Kacen Bayless

February 21, 2024

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Missouri Gov. Mike Parson on Tuesday announced he is sending up to 200 Missouri National Guard members and 22 State Highway Patrol troopers to the Texas border with Mexico.

The Republican governor made the announcement at a news conference in Jefferson City in which he blamed President Joe Biden's administration for its handling of immigration at the southern border and tied illegal immigration to the country's fentanyl crisis.

"It all stems from the Biden administration's reckless, irresponsible and failing open-border policies," Parson said. "With our southern border wide open, every state is now a border state."

Parson's executive order sends Missouri law enforcement officers to help Texas, which has promoted a plan dubbed "Operation Lone Star" that uses Texas state resources to combat illegal border crossings. The move from Parson is noteworthy, as roughly 250 Missouri National Guard members are already deployed to the southern border to work with the Biden administration's U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency.

The Texas initiative is separate from federal border enforcement activities. The dual efforts, which include a dispute between Texas and the federal government over the use of razor wire, have escalated into a broader standoff between state and federal officials.

"This will be a separate mission," Parson said, when asked about the two competing border efforts. "This is in addition."

When pressed on the fact that Missouri would have National Guard members working for both the federal government and Texas, Parson said Missouri would be "under Texas' blanket."

"But let me say this right now, even the federal employees there, the vast majority don't like what's going on, the border patrol don't like what's going on," he said. "But they have to follow orders."

The Republican governor told reporters on Tuesday that he is requesting roughly \$2.3 million from Missouri lawmakers to foot the bill for the deployment. The highway patrol troopers will deploy on March 1 and the National Guard members will start on March 10, he said.

The announcement comes as Republicans across the country have sought to draw attention to the U.S.-Mexico border ahead of the 2024 presidential election. Federal agents have reported more than 285,000 encounters at the border from October through December, according to federal data.

Parson made the announcement after visiting Texas earlier this month, where he met with Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott and 13 other GOP governors. Missouri Republican lawmakers are also weighing bills that would allow prosecutors to criminally prosecute individuals in the United States illegally.

While Republicans have called for stricter border control efforts, conservatives in the U.S. Senate earlier this month killed a bipartisan \$118 billion plan. Missouri's two senators, Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt, voted against the deal.

Earlier this month, Rep. Ashley Aune, a Kansas City Democrat, criticized Parson for tying the fentanyl crisis to illegal immigration, saying the Republican governor was “scapegoating immigrants to distract from his inability or unwillingness to actually address them.”

Aune pointed to a report from the Cato Institute, a Libertarian think tank, that used 2021 sentencing data to show that a large majority of convicted fentanyl traffickers were U.S. citizens compared to undocumented immigrants.

Parson on Tuesday said this data “missed the point,” calling it political “spin.” However, he did not directly refute the data.

“It doesn't matter who the smuggler is,” Parson said. “The issue is the Mexican cartels see little to no resistance in shipping fentanyl across our borders. They're going to get Americans, citizens to peddle these drugs. Cartel's not going to come up here and set up in your town. But they will have people that's going to produce and try to sell you their supplies and our kids.”