



Ken Cuccinelli: Father, Daughter Who Died In Rio Grande ‘Didn’t Want To Wait’

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June 28, 2019

The acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services on Thursday blamed the recent drowning deaths of a father and daughter seeking asylum in the United States on the father, Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez, who he said “didn’t want to wait to go through the asylum process.”

Ramírez and his 23-month-old daughter Valeria drowned in an attempt to cross the Rio Grande reportedly only after they were denied an opportunity to claim asylum. The Trump administration has used “metering,” or the practice of limiting the number of daily asylum claims that can be made at ports of entry, at the southern border.

In an interview with Acting USCIS Director Ken Cuccinelli, an immigration hardliner, CNN’s Erin Burnett asked if he was worried that the image of Ramírez’s and his daughter’s bodies would come to represent the administration’s border policies.

“No, in fact just the opposite,” Cuccinelli replied. “The reason we have tragedies like that on the border is because those folks— That father didn’t want to wait to go through the asylum process in the legal fashion and decided to cross the river and not only died but his daughter died tragically as well.”

“Until we fix the attractions in our asylum system, people like that father and that child are going to continue to come through a dangerous trip,” he added.

However, investigators in the Department of Homeland Security’s inspector general’s office have observed the potentially correlative relationship between metering and illegal crossings. In September, the IG’s office mentioned metering in a report on the administration’s family separation policy.

“A CBP official reported that the backlogs created by these competing directives [metering, combined with the administration’s “zero tolerance” policy] likely resulted in additional illegal border crossings,” the report stated. Later, referring to the possible “unintended consequences” of metering, the investigators reported: “OIG saw evidence that limiting the volume of asylum-seekers entering at ports of entry leads some aliens who would otherwise seek legal entry into the United States to cross the border illegally.”

“According to one Border Patrol supervisor” the report continued, “the Border Patrol sees an increase in illegal entries when aliens are metered at ports of entry.” Three undocumented people recently apprehended by Border Patrol confirmed as much to the investigators.

“The fact that both aliens and the Border Patrol reported that metering leads to increased illegal border crossings strongly suggests a relationship between the two,” the investigators wrote.

Several civil and immigrants’ rights groups sued over the practice in 2017. That suit is ongoing. President Donald Trump, like Cuccinelli, has denied responsibility for the Ramírezes deaths. On Wednesday, he blamed Democrats.

Occasionally, administration officials are more direct. The libertarian Cato Institute earlier this year flagged a statement from a senior Customs and Border Protection official, who reportedly said “[t]he more we process, the more will come.”