



Noem worries about terrorists crossing the southern border, CATO Institute says instances are rare

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SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (KELO) — Governor Kristi Noem repeated a concern on Friday, April 23, that she’s shared on social media about potential threats from people entering the U.S. through the southern border with Mexico.

Noem’s comments come as there has been a surge in individuals seeking asylum and/or undocumented individuals trying to enter the U.S. at the southern border. In March 2021, CBP encountered more than 172,000 persons attempting entry along the Southwest border, U.S Customs and Border Protection said in an April 8 update. Most of those were single adults but at least 18,890 were unaccompanied children. according to the CBP.

Noem posted on her Twitter account on April 14 that “Multiple media outlets have reported that **TERRORISTS** have been apprehended at the southern border.”

On April 23, following an appearance at Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken’s fitness challenge kick-off event, Noem again referred to border activity by saying individuals on the terrorist watch list are entering the U.S. through the border with Mexico.

But two of Noem’s own sources on terrorists entering the southern U.S. border don’t list a surge in arrests of terrorists or those on the terrorist watchlist. They did show that four have been apprehended trying to cross since Oct. 1.

While the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency has told multiple media outlets it does not generally release the number of persons on the terrorism watch list or who were on the country’s no fly list, the agency has told multiple media that such incidents are uncommon.

When KELOLAND News asked Noem’s communications director Ian Fury on April 14 to cite the sources of those multiple media outlets, Fury supplied two links: one to NBC news story from April 6 and one to an AXIOS story from March 21.

The AXIOS story reported that four people on a terrorist watch list had been arrested at the southern border since Oct. 1. The April 6 NBC story said two of them had been arrested since January.

The AXIOS story said “Former President Trump and other conservatives have frequently warned — sometimes inaccurately — about foreign terrorists entering the United States via the southern border.”

The NBC story said border officials said the arrests and such instances are “very uncommon.”

The Libertarian think tank, the Cato Institute, said in March 18 report that “terrorists are not crossing the Mexican border.”

The Cato Institute was founded by Charles Koch of Kansas.

There is a difference between known or suspected terrorists (KSTs) and Special Interest Aliens (SIAs), according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The FBI has a Terrorist Screening Database that is commonly referred to as the watchlist, according to FBI.

In her April 14 Twitter posts and comments on Friday, Noem appears to be channeling some of the same concerns aired by conservative Republicans and former Republican President Donald Trump since at least late 2018.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security sought to clarify and correct statements made by the Trump Administration in 2019 regarding individuals stopped at the border. The agency released a “MYTH/FACT: Known and Suspected Terrorists/Special Interest Aliens” on Jan. 7, 2019.

The DHS said in that report that “on average 10 individuals on the terrorist watchlist per day from traveling to or entering the United States—and more than 3,700 in Fiscal Year 2017.”

Most enter the U.S. through the air, according to the DHS.

A special interest alien or (SIA) is not the same as a terrorist, the agency said. But patterns of behavior could indicate a possibility to take steps to be one, according to the agency.

The White House (during Trump’s presidency) incorrectly used the 3,755 figure in a presentation when it called SIAs “known or suspected terrorists,” the DHS said.

But SIAs are often “individuals who have obtained false documents, or used smugglers to evade security across multiple countries. In addition, some have engaged in criminal activity that could pose a danger to the United States, and some are found to have links to terrorism after additional investigative work and analysis by CBP personnel,” the DHS said in the January 2019 release.

From 2007 through the end of 2019, Border Patrol apprehended 91,132 SIAs from countries that have ever spent time on the publicly available SIA lists, according to the Cato Institute. “None of

them were convicted for carrying out, attempting to carry out, or planning a terrorist attack on U.S. soil,” the Cato Institute said.

A KST is “an individual who has been (a) arrested, charged by information, indicted for, or convicted of a crime related to terrorism and/or terrorist activities by U.S. Government or foreign government authorities; or (b) identified as a terrorist or a member of a terrorist organization pursuant to statute, Executive Order, or international legal obligation pursuant to a United Nations Security Council Resolution,” the DHS said in its January 2019 release.

Noem’s April 14 Twitter posts came as President Joe Biden and others were discussing moving undocumented and migrant children from shelters at the border to locations within the U.S..

The CBP said on April 8 that violence, natural disasters, food insecurity, and poverty in Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries of Central America are the main reasons for the increases at the southern border.