



## **Gov. Doug Ducey rips President Joe Biden for immigration policies during border visit**

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Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey laid into President Joe Biden during a visit to the U.S.-Mexico border Friday, blasting the Democrat and his administration for being "totally divorced from the reality on the ground."

Pointing to a recent spike in border apprehensions — as well as a surge in arrivals of unaccompanied migrant children — Ducey, a Republican, slammed Biden for reversing a series of aggressive immigration policies implemented by his predecessor, former President Donald Trump.

"I've been governor under three presidents, and this is by far the worst situation we've seen," Ducey said during a news conference held in front of the border wall in Douglas. "Washington has never been more out of touch, and it starts at the top."

Ducey, who'd made border security a centerpiece of his 2018 re-election campaign, had billed the trip as an effort to investigate the recent influx of migrants arriving there. U.S. Sen. Rick Scott, a Florida Republican and member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, accompanied him for the same reason.

But after being briefed by public safety officials and touring the border by helicopter, the pair seemed to have little new information to show for it. Instead, they used their time at the microphone to repeat previous criticisms of the new president's approach.

"This is a crisis that is man-made by one man: Joe Biden," Scott said. "What Joe Biden has done is made it very difficult for us to do any immigration reform in this country."

Ducey said the president had given migrants the impression "that our borders are open, that asylum policies have changed, and an amnesty bill is in the works" — and left Arizona to "pick up the pieces."

"The Biden administration can and should correct this perception and work to deter individuals from making this dangerous journey," Ducey said.

### **Biden quick to roll back Trump-era rules**

Upon taking office, Biden made immediate moves to change or eliminate policies Trump had imposed to sharply curb migrant activity at the border.

He swiftly suspended enrollment of new cases under the Migrant Protection Protocols, or "Remain in Mexico" policy, which required asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico for the duration of their asylum proceedings. And he reversed Trump's rule barring asylum for migrants who didn't first seek protection in Mexico or a third country.

Immigration reform advocates had predicted a rollback would prompt an explosion in border arrivals, given the significant backlog of migrants and asylum-seekers Trump's policies had helped create. But the Biden administration appears to have been caught off guard by the size and speed of the recent surge, which has overwhelmed detention facilities.

"We want to partner with the federal government to improve our immigration system," Ducey said. "So far, I'm not encouraged."

Karine Jean-Pierre, White House deputy press secretary, acknowledged "a challenge at the border" when speaking to national reporters Friday. But she contended the "chaos, cruelty and confusion" that reigned under Trump "did not enhance security, and it did nothing to fix our immigration system."

"(Biden) is committed to implementing an immigration system that is orderly, that is humane, compassionate and lawful," she said. "His approach is focused on bold action to keep our country safe, strong and prosperous."

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The White House also has said the "vast, vast majority (of migrants) who come to the border are turned away." GOP officials throughout the U.S. have described the situation much differently, seizing on Biden's policy decisions — and the fallout — as evidence he and other Democrats are soft on border issues.

The strategy has given prominent Republicans a chance to highlight a national security issue important to their base. Scott leads the National Republican Senatorial Committee, which works to get GOP senators elected, while Ducey does the same for GOP governors as head of the Republican Governors Association.

Former Trump aide Stephen Miller told the Associated Press Republicans were "increasingly realizing that this can be one of the most potent issues" heading into the 2022 midterm elections, particularly as the GOP seeks to take back seats in Congress.

In the more immediate future, the unfolding crisis could doom key parts of Biden's immigration agenda, including two bills passed Thursday by the House.

One would provide a pathway to permanent legal status for the more than 2 million "dreamers" brought to the U.S. unlawfully as children. The other would create an opportunity for undocumented farmworkers to gain legal status.

To make it out of the Senate, though, the measures will need support from 10 Republicans and every Democrat. Judging from Scott's remarks at the border Friday — he said Democrats "don't have an interest" in border security and "don't want to solve immigration" — he could be among the "no" votes.

"I think it's likely that many Republicans will use the problems at the southern border as an excuse not to join any bills related to legalization," said Sarah Pierce, a U.S. immigration policy analyst at the bipartisan Migration Policy Institute.

Jean-Pierre urged just the opposite. "If they want to come to the table and help with the challenge that we're seeing, then they've got to come to the table (on legislation) as well," she said.

Border apprehensions could hit 20-year high this year

The flood of migrants arriving at the border likely won't disappear anytime soon. The Department of Homeland Security has said it expects border apprehensions to hit a 20-year high this year.

In February alone, agents in the Border Patrol's Tucson and Yuma sectors detained 1,750 unaccompanied minors and 2,710 migrants traveling as families. That represented a 62% increase in children and a 186% increase in families compared to January.

"We have to understand and remember what the migrants are going through and the reason why they're coming," Jean-Pierre said Friday. "They're coming from corruption, violence — countries where they face that every day."

Though children traveling alone have additional legal protections and stringent requirements for their care, she said the Biden administration had no intention of sending "unaccompanied children ... back to a dangerous situation."

"The administration is going to treat these children with the same care and compassion as we would treat our own children," she said.

While Ducey has called the growing number of unaccompanied minors a humanitarian crisis, he did not meet with migrant advocacy groups himself while on the ground in Douglas.

He also did not choose to visit the Yuma area, where border agents have released some 1,300 migrants on humanitarian parole. On Tuesday, officials announced they planned to build two additional "soft-sided facilities," or outdoor tents, in Yuma and Tucson to help with overflow.

Agents also told leaders, nonprofits and churches throughout Cochise, Santa Cruz, Pima, Pinal and Maricopa counties to prepare for additional drop-offs, despite rural border communities lacking the infrastructure to safely house or relocate migrants.

By Friday afternoon, Border Patrol agents had released the first group of migrants — about 21 people — in Ajo.

The International Sonoran Desert Alliance provided the migrants with water and snacks and conducted rapid COVID-19 tests, according to executive director Aaron Cooper. They then put the group on a shuttle to Casa Alitas, which cares for migrant families.

The most recent federal COVID-19 relief package set aside \$110 million for nonprofits and governments helping at the southern border. But Ducey said Arizona and other border states need more resources and more leadership.

He called on the Biden administration to visit the border in person, provide more COVID-19 testing to migrants and make immediate policy and messaging changes instead of being the "marketing arm of the cartels to traffic drugs" and children.

Strain on migration system predates Biden

One Trump-era policy Biden did keep in place is known as Title 42. It allows border agents to quickly expel undocumented migrants, including families, to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

But David Bier — an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank that favors fewer restrictions on immigration — said Biden officials had badly "mangled" the messaging surrounding that and other policy decisions, upsetting Republicans and Democrats alike.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas told lawmakers during a hearing Wednesday that he had ended the policy of expelling unaccompanied minors under the provision. In reality, a court made that decision in November.

"He is adding to the perception that he opened it up and he was the one who is going to allow the kids to come in, and that is just building the case that the reason the kids are coming is because you changed the policy," Bier said.

Ducey and Scott insisted that Biden was solely to blame for the current surge in arrivals, even though apprehensions of adults had begun ticking up in spring of last year.

Ducey went as far as to say border issues "were largely solved" under Trump, sidestepping questions about the 2018 family separation policy a congressional committee later said was marked by "reckless incompetence and intentional cruelty."

And Scott said American citizens should "be furious" with the current president.

"Joe Biden needs to get down here to the border and look at exactly what he's done, and do everything he can to just secure this border," he said. "His actions are putting people at risk."

Yuma lawmaker sees situation differently

State Rep. Charlene Fernandez, D-Yuma, had a different perspective, suggesting threats of widespread criminal activity were overblown.

She said much of the migrant activity she'd observed in recent weeks had involved advocacy groups working to ensure those dropped off in border towns had food, water and clothing.

Fernandez also questioned the value of an event she said seemed to largely revolve around "pointing fingers."

Alluding to House Speaker Rusty Bowers and a handful of other Republican lawmakers who participated in the border visit, she suggested "the Arizona state Legislature start addressing the need for vaccines in my area and COVID relief throughout Arizona before posing for a photo op in Douglas."