



If you think mocking a detained special-needs child is OK, you might not want to read this

Bob Gabordi

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If you are not completely outraged when someone mocks a 10-year-old born with Down syndrome, please stop reading this now. There is *nothing* more for us to talk about.

You would simply be wasting your time.

That the person who did this is close to the president of the United States makes it appalling. On Fox News last week, Corey Lewandowski, former campaign manager for President Donald Trump, interrupted fellow panelist Zac Petkanas as he raised concerns about a Mexican child with Down syndrome being separated from her mother at the southwest U.S. border.

"Womp, womp," Lewandowski said, mimicking the muted trombone sound of sadness long used in comedies, game shows and cartoons.

"When you cross the border illegally, when you commit a crime, you are taken away from your family because that's how this country works," he went on to say.

Let's be honest with each other. The immigration issues we face as a country are difficult and heart-wrenching. No administration has handled them well and President Trump did not invent separating children from their families when they enter the United States illegally.

Megyn Kelly blasted former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski over his reaction to news about a 10-year-old migrant girl with Down Syndrome who was separated from her mother at the border. Buzz60

But there is a lot wrong with what Lewandowski said on so many levels, especially when you examine this case more closely and you take a Down syndrome child away from her family. As the parent of a special-needs child, the inhumanity of that overwhelms my emotions.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection issued a statement following Lewandowski's comment, saying the family was not detained and separated as a result of the White House's "zero-

tolerance" immigration policy. Customs acknowledged the mother and child were separated, but said it was because the mother is "a witness in (a) smuggling incident."

The mother has not been charged with a crime and isn't being prosecuted, the agency said. They need her as a witness.

Some background, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection:

The mother and her five children were in a vehicle driven by a U.S. citizen. When stopped, the mother admitted to being illegally in the United States. Three of the children are U.S. citizens and were released to an aunt. The child with Down syndrome is a Mexican citizen and was turned over to the department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Amid public outcry over the thousands of migrant children separated from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border, President Donald Trump signed an executive order to keep families together. Here's a wrap-up of everything that led to this moment. Just the FAQs

It's hard to know why all the children couldn't be kept together with the aunt, but we live in a "zero-tolerance" society. Rules are rules, after all. Humanity be damned.

Because the mother and other detainees at the border are not charged with crimes, immigration attorney Elizabeth Ricci explained to me, they are not entitled to be provided with legal counsel. Most likely, they do not have a private attorney, either.

"We (as a country) do offer humanitarian parole and something called direct deferred action for people who have family members with serious conditions like this," she said. "They are rarely pursued but do exist."

"As the parent of a special-needs child, the inhumanity of that overwhelms my emotions."

— **Bob Gabordi, father of Jessica Gabordi, who has Rett syndrome**

But without legal counsel, the detainees probably wouldn't know these avenues exist or how to apply. In this case, the child's father is a legal U.S. resident.

This case illustrates the complexities of these issues and why they deserve so much more thought than "zero tolerance" or "womp, womp."

There are legal avenues we, as a country, have set up to allow a family like this to stay together. But instead of a thoughtful, solution-oriented, humanitarian-based response, this guy who is close to the president and a member of Vice President Mike Pence's political action committee offers us "womp, womp."

First lady Melania Trump wore a jacket that read "I DON'T REALLY CARE, DO U?" while on her way to visit immigrant children separated from their parents. USA TODAY

When questioned he said he won't apologize. He has no regrets.

Why?

Because we have dehumanized immigrants who crossed the border illegally, turned them into scapegoats for our national ills. We blame them for crime, despite well-researched reports that say undocumented immigration does not increase the crime rate.

Even the libertarian Cato Institute concluded “that immigrants do not increase local crime rates and that they are less likely to cause crime and less likely to be incarcerated than their native-born peers.”

Yet, our government tells us they are protecting U.S. citizens from families like this one trying to escape poverty and crime and reuniting as a family with their father.

For our good, I guess, we yank a child with Down syndrome away from her mother and siblings and then publicly mock her. Because, as Lewandowski said, that’s how this country apparently now works.

And that’s a real “womp, womp.”