

Obama calls for \$3.7 billion border security “surge”

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The Obama administration called on Congress Tuesday to approve \$3.7 billion in funds to address what it has called a “humanitarian crisis” brought on by a wave of immigrants from Central America. The funds will go to expanding detention facilities and further militarizing the border with Mexico. The \$3.7 billion figure is a significant increase from the \$2 billion the administration had told newspapers it would be requesting.

The Democrats, Republicans and media have seized upon the plight of tens of thousands of children detained on the border—coming mostly from the violence-torn Central American states of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador—to intensify plans to turn the border into an armed camp.

With each passing day, the White House has stepped up its efforts to appease its critics even further to the right than itself by adopting a more brutal attitude to the impoverished children seeking entry to the US, in many cases in an attempt to reunite with their parents.

Obama’s plan constitutes a “super-aggressive deterrence and enforcement strategy,” a senior administration official told the *Washington Post*. Another administration spokesperson told the press unequivocally, “Children who do not qualify for humanitarian relief will be returned, and we are seeking to return them more expeditiously.”

The White House said in a letter to House Speaker John Boehner that the funding would “support a sustained border security surge through enhanced domestic enforcement, including air surveillance” by drones, along with additional staff to speed up deportations, including “immigration judge teams” and prosecutors.

More than 52,000 unaccompanied children have been captured crossing the US border this year, double the

number from the previous year. Additionally, 39,000 adults and children traveling together have been seized.

Obama is scheduled to visit Dallas, Texas on Wednesday, and Austin, Texas on Thursday. The administration has offered to meet privately with Texas Republican Governor Rick Perry after the latter provocatively declined to meet the president for a public photo-op in front of Air Force One.

Even the massive escalation of border repression called for by Obama is not enough for the Republican congressional leadership, which has demanded that the National Guard be deployed. “The speaker still supports deploying the National Guard to provide humanitarian support in the affected areas—which this proposal does not address,” said Michael Steel, a spokesman for Boehner.

The \$3.7 billion in additional funds is to be split between the Department of Homeland Security, which will receive \$1.5 billion, the Department of Justice, to get \$64 million, the State Department, \$300 million, and the Department of Health and Human Services, \$1.8 billion. While the White House has cynically sought to present the funding as humanitarian relief, the *Wall Street Journal* candidly pointed out that most of the money will be spent “on detention facilities to hold the migrants.”

The additional Department of Homeland Security funding includes \$40 million to “increase air surveillance capabilities that would support 16,526 additional flight hours for border surveillance and 16 additional crews for unmanned aerial systems to improve detection and interdiction of illegal activity.” This will mean a major expansion of the use of military drones within the borders of the United States.

A further \$109 million will go to “doubling the size of [US] vetted units in El Salvador, Guatemala and

Honduras” and expanding the activity of Immigration and Customs Enforcement inside the United States.

In his letter to Boehner, Obama called on Congress to loosen a 2008 law, signed by President George W. Bush, that gives child migrants from countries that are non-contiguous to the US greater access to due process and ensures that they stay with sponsor families, instead of in detention facilities, while their deportation cases are ongoing.

The letter called for giving “authority to exercise discretion in processing the return and removal of unaccompanied minor children from non-contiguous countries like Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.” This would allow the government more leeway to warehouse child migrants in detention centers and throw them out of the country without a trial.

Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona reiterated his own call to repeal the 2008 law, saying, “The message has to be, ‘If you cross our border illegally, you will be returned immediately.’”

Additionally, the administration plan calls for \$5 million in US-backed advertising campaigns in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras informing potential migrants of the crackdown and the fact that those apprehended will be turned away from the US—if they survive the crossing.

The proposal also includes \$879 million to expand detention facilities capable of housing families. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the US has only one such facility, which is located in Pennsylvania and can hold fewer than one hundred people, meaning that most families are released and told to report to court after a period of time. The additional funding will make sure immigrant families are incarcerated instead.

The allocation of billions of dollars to detain and imprison child immigrants and militarize the border comes as the Obama administration and Congress are waging a vicious campaign against social spending at home. Food stamps have been slashed twice over the past year, while extended jobless benefits have been eliminated on the grounds that there is no money to pay for these vital services.



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