

Obama aides, Republicans push US border crackdown

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14 July 2014

Obama administration officials and leading Republicans voiced their support for a further crackdown on immigrant children entering the United States in comments made Sunday on several network television interview programs.

There was a division of labor in their comments, with Obama aides defending their handling of the influx of child refugees and the Republicans portraying the border crisis as the product of administration “softness” on immigration. But the substantive differences were minimal. The Republicans are prepared to support Obama’s proposed supplemental appropriation of \$3.7 billion for increased border security, albeit with some quibbling over the amount of money and what it pays for.

Both the Democratic president and congressional Republicans endorse a revision of a 2008 law, passed to counter sex trafficking of minors that bars the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) from immediately deporting child immigrants unless they are citizens of Mexico or Canada, the two countries that share borders with the United States.

The bulk of the immigrant children being detained on the US-Mexico border in the past several months are from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, and therefore cannot be deported immediately. Under the 2008 law, the DHS must turn them over to the Department of Health and Human Services within 72 hours, and they are to be held under the “least restrictive” possible conditions. This has meant, in practice, releasing most child immigrants to the custody of relatives already in the United States.

In an interview on the ABC News program “This Week,” Attorney General Eric Holder rejected claims that the administration had failed to act with sufficient force against the immigrant children crossing the Texas

border. “The immigration laws are being enforced,” he declared. “The president has put together a proposal to Congress asking for almost \$4 billion. We are surging immigration judges to the border to process all of these people.”

Holder dismissed criticism from civil liberties groups that the Central American children were being denied due process and that too many people were being deported, saying, “We’re certainly going to get criticized from both sides. But what we’re certainly also going to do is make sure that we follow the law.”

He echoed the remarks made by Jeh Johnson, secretary of homeland security, who told a Senate panel Thursday, “Our message to those who are coming here illegally, to those who are contemplating coming here illegally into south Texas, is we will send you back.” Johnson was testifying in favor of legislation that would give the DHS discretion to treat immigrants from Central America in the same way as immigrants from Mexico, i.e., to deport them immediately, without a hearing or legal representation.

Republican Governor of Texas Rick Perry, appearing on Fox News Sunday, repeated his call for 1,000 more National Guard troops on the border as well as the deployment of thousands more Border Patrol agents to the Rio Grande.

“They need to be right on the river,” he said. “They need to be there as a show of force, because that’s the message that gets sent back very quickly to Central America.” He urged President Obama to “pick up the phone today, call the DOD [Department of Defense] and direct them to have the 1,000 National Guard troops on the border.”

When his interviewer pointed out that National Guard troops are not legally authorized to make arrests, Perry made it clear that the purpose was to intimidate

prospective immigrants. “What we’re talking about is sending the message back now so we can stanch the bleeding,” he said. “What you have to have is this clear presence on the border, where people understand that you no longer can just freely go and walk across the Rio Grande and stay in America from now on.”

Republican Congressman Michael McCaul, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, called for changing the 2008 law to “provide for more swift removal” of the Central American immigrants now being detained in the tens of thousands. He promised action this month on such legislation.

McCaul also suggested that rather than processing immigrants in detention centers on US soil, the US government should contract for facilities in the countries of origin—in other words, the US would pay the governments of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras to imprison their own people to prevent them from fleeing northwards from gang violence, political repression and crushing poverty.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Robert Goodlatte, a Republican from Virginia, effectively endorsed the Obama administration request, saying, “[W]e should do targeted appropriations where it’s needed to make sure that we are able to detain people and send them back to their countries.”

He also called for increased US intervention south of the border, saying that Obama should go to Mexico City and demand that the Mexican government enforce its own border with Guatemala to prevent Central American refugees from passing through towards the United States.

Perhaps the most deranged comments came from another Republican congressman, Mike Rogers, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, who claimed that the Central American immigrants were not fleeing gang violence but were actually being recruited and transported by the gangs to gain access to the United States.

He declared the border influx to be a “public health security problem” because of diseases the immigrants were supposedly carrying, as well as a “national security problem” because terrorists from countries in the Middle East “are using the southern border to infiltrate the United States.”

He did not explain how Al Qaeda was able to masquerade as ten-year-old Guatemalan girls and boys

or their mothers, nor did his interviewer, David Gregory of NBC News’ “Meet the Press,” bother to ask him.

Democratic Party supporters of the Obama administration who appeared on the Sunday interview programs defended the administration’s repressive measures against immigrants, which have resulted in the deportation of more than two million people since Obama entered the White House, the largest number of forcible expulsions carried out by any US administration.

Former White House strategist David Plouffe, appearing on ABC’s “This Week,” hailed the “unprecedented border resources, more in terms of people, in terms of personnel, in terms of money.”

Former Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm cited five points of agreement between Democrats and Republicans, including speedy deportations and “a message sent to Central America that if you send your kids here, our borders are not open.”

The callousness of US ruling circles over the plight of tens of thousands of immigrants was captured in an exchange on “This Week” between ABC panelist Cokie Roberts and pundit Bill Kristol, publisher of the right-wing *Weekly Standard*.

Roberts wrung her hands over the conditions in Central America, saying, “I heard a report this week that in New York your chances of getting murdered are 1 in 25,000. In Honduras, it’s 1 in 14. You can’t send children home to that.”

Kristol replied, “I’m afraid you have to,” adding, “absolutely—we send children back to Mexico. We send children back all over the world.”



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