

US Congress considers legislation to fast-track deportation of children

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This Tuesday, a bipartisan bill called the HUMANE Act was proposed to deny the vast majority of child migrants the right to an immigration hearing, while Republicans in the US House gave their recommendations on how best to prevent migrants from reaching the US.

Over the past eight months over 52,000 unaccompanied children have been detained after crossing the Mexican border, the majority of them from Central America. Although the White House has painted the deportation of these children as sending them “home,” an estimated 80 percent cross the border in order to be with close relatives already in the US.

The Obama administration projects that up to 150,000 unaccompanied minors will flee Central America next year. The unified response of Democrats and Republicans to this humanitarian crisis has been to streamline the process of detaining, intimidating and deporting these children.

The central proposal of the HUMANE Act, requested by President Obama, is to close a “loophole” in a 2008 human trafficking law that grants immigration hearings to migrant children from non-bordering countries. Currently, unaccompanied children from Canada and Mexico are required to be repatriated within 48 hours, while children from other countries are turned over to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and granted hearings.

The proposed legislation would in effect only bring the law into line with current practice. The Obama administration has already begun expedited deportations by executive order.

On Monday, the US deported 17 women and 21 children to Honduras. The children, the youngest only 18 months old, were flown to San Pedro Sula, a city most widely known as the murder capital of the world

due to enormous amounts of drug-related violence.

Homicide rates in the city are twice the national average at 187 per 100,000, and Hondurans are subjected to not just gang violence but extrajudicial killings carried out by the police. According to a Reuters report, the children being sent back to this city were given balloons to play with for the trip.

Mass poverty and political repression combine with extreme violence to create unbearable conditions in many parts of Central America. The UN estimates that almost 1.5 million people in Honduras have no access to potable water.

Against all reason, the sponsor of a bill similar to the HUMANE Act, Rep. Ken Calvert (Republican of California), claimed that denying children immigration hearings and quickly deporting them was for their own protection.

“The long and dangerous journey from Central America to the Texas border, especially one aided by a smuggler, is something that no one, especially an unaccompanied child, should endure,” Calvert said. “The humane and responsible step for these children and for our immigration policy is to close this loophole and the incentive it provides.”

In similarly Orwellian language, the Democratic sponsor of the HUMANE Act, Rep. Henry Cuellar of Texas, suggested that it was a question of equality to deny to Central American children the same rights they deny Mexicans. “We want to make sure that all unaccompanied children are treated exactly the same,” he said.

The goal of both Democrats and Republicans is to thoroughly militarize the border and greatly increase the rate of deportation.

Last year the Senate passed the “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration

Modernization Act of 2013,” which provisions for thousands more border security personnel, the construction of additional border fences, and the use of the National Guard and drones for patrolling the border.

The bill was developed and proposed by the “Group of Eight” in the US Senate, comprised of four Democrats and four Republicans. It has not been brought before the House and it is unclear whether that will occur.

Since it was passed last year it has been criticized by one of its Republican sponsors, Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, for not going far enough in militarizing the border.

According to Rubio, use of the National Guard and other extreme measures in this bill would not have prevented the surge of migrant children. Instead the children coming to the country should have confronted “sufficient border security on the ground,” that would “discourage people from making the journey in the first place.”

In order to support their inhumane policies, politicians are appealing to the most backward layers of American society. On Tuesday in Oracle, Arizona, anti-immigrant protesters sought to stop the temporary placement of about 40 children at an academy for troubled youth near their town.

The local sheriff, Paul Babeu, has sought to whip up hysteria over the issue, claiming that the children could be gang members or carry infectious diseases. The sheriff then disseminated the precise location where the young migrants would be placed. The organizer of the protests, Robert Skiba, told the *Arizona Republic* that Babeu first told him of the children’s expected arrival at a local National Rifle Association meeting.

The protesters held up signs with slogans like “Go home non-Yankees.” This is the constituency both political parties appeal to with their anti-immigrant policies.



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