

Biden's DHS to refugees: "Do not come!"

Immigrant deaths and injuries surging along US-Mexico border wall

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Physicians at the University of California at San Diego released a study last week in the journal *JAMA Surgery* documenting the number of immigrants who have died or been injured attempting to scale sections of the new US-Mexico border wall. The study is the first to record the casualties along the structure Donald Trump boasted “can’t be climbed.” U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), an agency within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), says it does not tally such deaths or injuries.

According to the report, the number of patients arriving at the UC San Diego Medical Center’s trauma ward after falling off the structure has increased five-fold since 2019, when the border wall’s height was raised to 30 feet. Since then, the number of deaths has gone from zero to 16, according to records from the San Diego County medical examiner. Wounded patients are now arriving every day in the region’s hospitals.

The report comes at a time when President Biden has continued the anti-immigrant policies of his Republican and Democratic predecessors and set all-time high records for immigration arrests along the southern border. Title 42, which denies migrants the right to asylum and mandates that they be summarily expelled, using the pandemic as a pretext for denying any form of due process, has been used first by the Trump and now the Biden administration to compound a humanitarian catastrophe for immigrants fleeing from poverty and violence in their home countries.

Hector Almeida, a 33-year-old dentist from Cuba, fractured his leg in a fall on April 25 and wound up being treated at UC San Diego Health. He told *The Washington Post* he saw a woman fall and break both legs, as well as an older man who fell and suffered a severe head injury.

Jay Doucet, chief of the trauma division at UC San Diego Health, said that before the height of the wall was increased, there were injuries but no deaths. The older wall ranged in height from nine to 17 feet, but the new sections range from 20 to 30 feet, resulting in higher rates of death and injury.

Doucet said, “We’re seeing injuries we didn’t see before: pelvic fractures, spinal cord injuries, brain injuries and a lot of open fractures when the bone comes through the skin.”

Scripps Mercy Hospital, another major trauma center in San Diego, said border wall victims accounted for 16 percent of the 230 patients treated last month, more than gunshot and stabbing wounds. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Vishal Bansal, director of trauma at Scripps, said his ward treated 139 border wall patients last year, compared to 41 in 2020.

The wounded migrants, often uninsured, require long and costly surgeries and intensive care and have to remain longer in hospitals, which have to absorb millions in costs.

UC San Diego Health was inundated with so many wounded immigrants that a postpartum wing was converted into a makeshift recovery ward for them. At least \$13 million in costs have been incurred from the patients, and the number of fall victims is now straining the entire trauma system of San Diego.

The Trump administration developed a series of wall prototypes in 2017, with Trump himself preferring the more intimidating “spiky” designs. Officials decided to raise the new barriers to 30 feet, balancing cost concerns with the need of Border Patrol agents to respond in time to those attempting to scale the wall.

Despite the 30-foot barrier, which covers only a portion of the border, crossings have increased sharply. Border Patrol agents in San Diego, where 30-foot wall sections are concentrated, arrested 16,660 people in March, almost four times the monthly average of arrests before 2019.

Some border crossers use ropes and harnesses to descend the wall, but this has proven to be deadly as well. In April, a Mexican woman died from asphyxiation after her harness got stuck on the wall near Douglas, Arizona, leaving her hanging upside down for several hours.

Last year, an 18-year old girl suffered five broken vertebrae and a leg fracture after falling from the wall. She

had to be airlifted to a hospital in Northern California but she survived and is now able to walk again. Her attorney, Pricilla Higuera, told the *Post*, “You couple this bigger, taller wall with Title 42 and ‘Remain in Mexico,’ and it’s a recipe for disaster.”

The previous administration built 450 miles of new fencing along the border, costing \$11 billion, mostly replacing older and smaller barriers. While the Biden administration stopped construction after taking office, plans have been developed to close open gaps, mainly in Arizona.

On April 1, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that it would lift Title 42 on May 23, on the grounds that the COVID-19 pandemic, which was rapidly spreading when Title 42 was invoked by Trump’s CDC in March 2020, was essentially over. In fact, the pandemic is not over and cases are once again surging as the more infectious BA.2 subvariant of Omicron washes across the US and the rest of the world. But maintaining the blanket and illegal ban on migrants from Central and Latin America at the southern border has become politically inconvenient under conditions where Biden is openly pursuing the “herd immunity” policy of his predecessor and telling the public it must learn to “live with the virus.”

Trump and the Republicans have seized on the announced lifting of Title 42 to ramp up their fascistic attacks on immigrants and accuse Biden and the Democrats of deliberately creating an immigrant “invasion” to flood the US with drugs, crime and gang violence. In response, large numbers of Democratic lawmakers have demanded that Biden delay the lifting of Title 42 at least until after the November midterm elections, and the administration has indicated it may cave in to these demands.

In the meantime, Biden’s secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Alejandro Mayorkas, has released plans to increase the number of border cops and step up the use of “expedited removal” to maintain and even intensify the crackdown against migrants if and when Title 42 is lifted. Part of his plan is to ratchet up pressure on Mexico and Central American governments to increase their own border “security” so as to block migrants from reaching the US-Mexico border.

Mayorkas’ twenty-page, six-point plan notes that close to \$2 billion in additional funding for militarizing the border was allocated in the 2022 fiscal year budget.

At a House Judiciary Committee hearing last Thursday, Republican Rep. Ken Buck of Colorado told Mayorkas, “My constituents want you impeached because they believe you’ve committed treason. They compare you to Benedict Arnold.”

Ranking Republican Jim Jordan of Ohio, who participated in White House meetings that plotted the overturn of the

2020 presidential election, said at the hearing: “We have a secretary of homeland security who is intentionally, deliberately, in a premeditated fashion... executing a plan to overwhelm our country with millions and millions of illegal migrants.”

Rep. Chip Roy of Texas held up pictures from border communities showing dead migrants, dead livestock and a little girl branded on her arm. He then accused “illegal” migrants of poisoning the country with fentanyl. “Hundreds—tens of thousands of Americans dying from fentanyl...Americans across this country die because of fentanyl pouring into our country.”

On the Sunday morning talk shows, Mayorkas repeatedly praised the 23,000 CBP officers and agents patrolling the border and told would-be immigrants, “My message is the same as last year: Do not come. The border is not open.”

During a brief question-and-answer period after Biden announced his request for another \$33 billion in aide to Ukraine last Thursday, the president was asked whether he supported the lifting of Title 42.

He responded, “We had proposed to eliminate that policy by the end of May. The court [federal district court in Louisiana] has said we can’t so far. And what the court says, we’re going to do. *The court could come along and say we cannot do that, and that’s it.*” (Emphasis added.)

The Trump-appointed judge in Louisiana issued a temporary restraining order last Wednesday against lifting Title 42. The order extends to May 13, when the judge will issue a permanent ruling.

Whether or not the Biden administration extends Title 42, the brutal crackdown on immigrants and refugees from neighboring countries will intensify, especially against those from the regions of Central and South America historically ravaged by US imperialism.



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