

Homeland Security chief Mayorkas boasts of “success” of Biden’s crackdown on asylum seekers

Kevin Reed
14 May 2023

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Director Alejandro Mayorkas made appearances on TV news programs on Sunday to tout the effectiveness of the Biden administration’s attacks on migrant asylum seekers in the two days since the Title 42 expulsion rules were lifted at midnight on Thursday.

Responding to a question by ABC News’ “This Week” anchor Jonathan Karl on the fact that the predicted surge of migrants at the southern border “hasn’t quite happened yet,” Mayorkas replied that the US Border Patrol has seen a “fifty-percent drop” in the number of people encountered since the days before Title 42 ended.

When asked why this was the case, Mayorkas praised the Biden administration, which he said has been “preparing for this transition for months and months and we have been executing on our plan accordingly.”

The Title 42 public health rules were first implemented by the Trump administration in March 2020 after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic as a means of expelling migrants without an asylum hearing, in violation of international law and their fundamental democratic rights.

DHS Director Mayorkas went on to state that those currently seeking asylum in the US at the southern border had a “safe, lawful and orderly way to reach the United States” through “lawful pathways that we have expanded,” as opposed to what he called “a dangerous way to arrive at our southern border in the hands of ruthless smugglers.”

Having falsely portrayed the Biden administration’s border policy as a campaign against human trafficking, Mayorkas quickly moved on, saying, “[W]e’ve already removed thousands of people who have arrived at our southern border” by enforcing “our traditional immigration enforcement authorities under Title 8 of the United States code.”

He added that the Biden administration had also issued a rule that “if one arrives at the southern border without either accessing the lawful pathways or seeking relief in one of the countries through which they have traveled,” they will be met with a five-year ban and potential criminal prosecution.

When ABC’s Karl pointed out that Biden’s new policy is essentially an asylum ban and very similar to that of the Trump White House, Mayorkas objected and claimed the Democrats had “a humanitarian obligation as well as a matter of security to cut the ruthless smugglers out.”

When pressed further on the issue, Mayorkas exposed the purpose of all references to smugglers as a cover for the administration’s anti-immigrant policy by saying, “We have an obligation to deliver consequences at our border...”

Developments in the immediate aftermath of the expiration of Title 42 show the Biden administration’s policies to be part of the overall right-wing and anti-immigrant posture of the entire US political establishment.

Late Thursday, a federal judge in Pensacola, Florida, sided with the arguments of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis that the Biden administration’s border policy would lead to large numbers of migrants being released into the United States.

US District Judge T. Kent Wetherell, a Trump appointee who supports the construction of a border wall between the US and Mexico, ruled that the Biden administration cannot use parole at the border to process migrants, allowing them into the US with instructions to report to immigration officials within two months. The DHS had issued an order allowing a fraction of migrants seeking asylum to be let into the US without a specific court date in order to alleviate overcrowding at border control

facilities.

As a result of the judge's ruling, the number of people in custody could rapidly rise to 45,000, according to Customs and Border Protection officials. This is far beyond the capacity of border holding facilities.

On Saturday morning, reports began surfacing on social media that far-right militiamen and vigilante groups were active along the Arizona-Mexico border and were confronting migrants. Avery Schmitz, a student activist who researches violent extremism and a legislative intern for Senator Kyrsten Sinema, wrote on Twitter that a group of armed men with ties to far-right militias in Arizona threatened migrants along the US-Mexico border near the Sasabe Port of Entry.

Schmitz wrote, "Dressed in camouflage, the men corralled migrants and collected biographical information from multiple groups that had just crossed the border from Mexico."

He added, "The group coordinated with border militia Veterans on Patrol, and included at least one member of the Proud Boys' AZ Highlands chapter. Among them, alt-right internet personality Ethan Schmidt, who gained notoriety for threatening to 'hunt' gay people."

Meanwhile, immigrant rights advocates have filed a lawsuit attacking the Biden administration for implementing a new asylum ban that "largely mimics" Trump era policies.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a suit in federal court in Northern California on Thursday seeking to halt the new policies. Along with the UC Hastings Center for Gender and Refugee Studies and the National Immigrant Justice Center, the ACLU argues that the new rules are unlawful.

The filing states, "After campaigning on a promise to restore our asylum system, the Biden Administration has instead doubled down on its predecessor's cruel asylum restrictions." It states further: "The agencies claim the Rule merely provides consequences for asylum seekers circumventing lawful pathways. But seeking asylum is a lawful pathway protected by our laws regardless of how one enters the country."

The lawsuit says that the Biden administration's new rule "operates just as the Trump administration's prior asylum bans did: Asylum seekers subject to the Rule—all non-Mexicans—are categorically barred unless they satisfy one of the enumerated and limited conditions or exceptions."

In his appearance on ABC News' "This Week" program, Mayorkas also made the thoroughly cynical

claim that the Biden administration was seeking to "address the root causes of why people flee their homes in the first instance." The role of US imperialism in Latin America, especially the region referred to as the Northern Triangle, including Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, has been to employ violence and subversion to suppress popular opposition to poverty, corruption and authoritarian rule.

The brutal reality that faces migrants attempting to enter the US has been exposed by the deaths of children in the custody of federal Health and Human Services (HHS) agencies. On Friday, the death of 17-year-old Angel Eduardo Maradiago Espinoza at a detention facility in Safety Harbor, Florida, near Tampa, was confirmed.

On Saturday, the teenager's mother, Norma Saraí Espinoza Maradiaga, told the Associated Press that her son had epilepsy, but his seizures were brief and not serious. "He had epilepsy, but it wasn't an illness that threatened him, because he had had it since he was eight," she said. "The longest a seizure would last was less than a minute. It seemed like it only hit him a little."

She added, "No one tells me anything. The anguish is killing me. They say they are awaiting the autopsy results and don't give me any other answer."

US government data shows that as of May 10, 8,681 unaccompanied children were in the care of HHS, and that unaccompanied children spend an average of 29 days in the custody of its Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). In fiscal 2022, 72 percent of minors referred to the ORR were above the age of 14, and about 64 percent were boys.

Some 29 percent of children in ORR custody came from Honduras, like Espinoza. Nearly half came from Guatemala and about 13 percent from El Salvador.

CBS News reported it had learned "that a 4-year-old child from Honduras in HHS custody died in March after being hospitalized for cardiac arrest in Michigan." The report also said, "The child, whose death has not been previously reported, was 'medically fragile,' HHS said in a notification to lawmakers at the time."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact