

# Florida Governor DeSantis dumped asylum seekers in Sacramento, California

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8 June 2023

This past week, two flights of asylum seekers from Latin America were unceremoniously dumped in Sacramento, California as part of a political stunt by Florida governor and Republican presidential candidate Ron DeSantis.

The 36 migrants, who were in the country legally, awaiting hearings on asylum claims, were picked up in Texas by contractors of the Florida Division of Emergency Management who made promises of jobs and support, driven to New Mexico and then flown to California as part of DeSantis' efforts to make anti-immigrant posturing central to his presidential bid.

They were dropped off in Sacramento, the state capital, with only the possessions they could carry, at the headquarters of the area's Roman Catholic diocese, which participates in Sacramento ACT, an interfaith organization that helps connect immigrants with legal services.

At a roundtable discussion with sheriffs in Arizona on Wednesday, DeSantis defended his action and promised further attacks on immigrants: "What I can pledge to you is this, when I'm president, we will be the one to finally bring this issue to a conclusion. We're going to shut the border down."

In addition to the deliberate cruelty of preying on the most vulnerable to appeal to fascistic elements in the Republican Party, it appears the Florida governor sought to sabotage these immigrants' asylum claims. Sacramento ACT told the *Sacramento Bee* that all 36 have pending court appearances to plead their case that will be disrupted after being shuttled across state lines under false pretenses.

DeSantis did the same thing in September last year, when he shipped 50 asylum seekers to Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts after Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents apparently falsified

the asylees' addresses so that they would have to appear in court all across the country, in some cases thousands of miles from where they were dropped. Florida has so far paid two law firms \$640,000 to defend against lawsuits from those affected.

California Democrats responded with hypocritical outrage attempting to score their own political points. Governor Gavin Newsom, widely expected to make a run for president in this election or the next, took to Twitter, calling DeSantis a "small, pathetic man," and raised the potential for "kidnapping charges." He quickly walked that back in an interview with NBC News Wednesday, calling charges against DeSantis hyperbolic. It is worth noting that while Newsom was lieutenant governor, California deployed soldiers of the state's National Guard as part of Trump's anti-immigrant campaign.

The recent flights to Sacramento were paid out of funds earmarked in Florida Senate Bill 1718. This bill is the harshest state measure against immigrants passed so far in the US, making a list of new felonies and fines to charge undocumented immigrants and deny them social services. A particularly heartless part of the bill makes it a felony to transport illegal immigrants into the state, so a mixed status family could face up to 15 years in prison for a family road trip that crossed state lines.

Passage of the bill resulted in calls by truck drivers to boycott the state and a growing exodus of agricultural and service industry workers, consequences that left Republicans scrambling. Florida state representatives Rick Roth, Alina Garcia and Juan Fernandez Barquin tried convincing a meeting of Hispanic ministers on Monday that the law was not meant to be enforced. According to NPR, Roth stated "I'm trying to tell people that it's more of a political bill than policy,"

DeSantis claims the draconian anti-immigrant bill addresses “Biden’s border crisis.” But for all of DeSantis and Newsom’s posturing, as though they were on opposite sides of the barricades, the Democratic Party is continuing and intensifying the brutal treatment of immigrants that has become a bipartisan mainstay of American politics.

Funding for Florida’s relocation program initially came from a budget supported by state Democrats, and far from welcoming immigrants, the Biden administration has been continuing Obama and Trump-era anti-immigrant measures that have created a genuine humanitarian crisis along the border.

After coming to office, Biden continued and expanded Trump’s Title 42 policy which barred asylum seekers from the country on the basis of public health. He expelled millions of asylum seekers on the pretext that they would bring in COVID-19. While steadily dismantling pandemic safety measures, Biden kept immigrants in overcrowded camps along the Mexican border. Now that he has ended the pandemic emergency despite, COVID-19 remaining a leading cause of death, Biden has continued to bar asylum seekers from entering the US. Instead, refugees are supposed to apply for asylum in their home countries or regional processing centers. If they apply at the US border and are rejected, they are then deported back to their home countries.

While waiting for their appointments, 65,000 immigrants are currently kept in camps on the Mexican side of the border in deplorable conditions, enforced by 25,000 soldiers deployed by Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. These camps regularly do not have running water or sanitation. If their applications are accepted for processing, the migrants are moved to crowded US facilities where they are frequently kept in freezing conditions without beds or blankets. In desperation, many young families and children attempt the dangerous crossing, only to be detained by the 24,000 Border Patrol agents and thousands of US soldiers.

The callous inhumanity which is characteristic of DeSantis, Biden and Newsom has led to a growing number of deaths along the border. In March, at least 40 refugees burned to death while locked in cells of a detention center in Ciudad Juarez. Over the past few weeks, several children have died in US custody. Last

month an 8-year-old and a 17-year-old died from medical emergencies in detention. Later in May, Border Patrol agents shot a US citizen to death at his home near the border.

These numbers are likely to grow, as the number of refugees denied entry at the border or expelled so far in 2023, 1.8 million, is ahead of last year’s pace.



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