

Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Oversight & Investigations Hearing
“A Humane Response:
Prioritizing the Well-Being of Unaccompanied Children”
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As Prepared for Delivery

A CRISIS CREATED

There is a humanitarian crisis, a national security crisis, and a public health crisis at our southern border... and the Biden administration is responsible for the historic surges.

While running for office and since taking his oath, President Biden and his administration have sent a clear message to migrants: our southern border is open, and you should come.

- On a debate stage, Biden gave an obvious wink and a nod to migrants when he said he would provide free health care for illegal immigrants.
- On Inauguration Day, President Biden signed and issued five immigration executive orders, some weakening our security and ability to stop the flow of illegal immigrants.
- Just last week, the Biden administration officially ended the Trump era “Remain in Mexico” policy.
- And for months, administration officials have made clear that they would not turn away any child trying to cross our border.

Let’s be clear... this is **NOT** a humane approach.

Encouraging migrants to make the dangerous journey north – particularly encouraging children – is **NOT** humane. Yet, thanks to this administration’s policies and rhetoric, we are seeing migrants come at unprecedented rates.

ISSUES

The U.S. Border Patrol has had over 51,400 encounters with unaccompanied children and single minors already this year.

In March alone, the number of unaccompanied children Border Patrol encountered reached nearly 19,000 – smashing the previous high by more than 60 percent.

And at the end of April, ORR had more than 23,000 children in its care.

More broadly than unaccompanied children, in April alone more than 178,000 migrants were encountered at the southern border – the highest one-month total in more than two decades.

There has also been a dangerous spike in drug trafficking, particularly for deadly and extremely lethal opioids.

As of April, the Customs and Border Protection seized more fentanyl this year than it did **ALL** of 2020.

And we know the surge brings with it public health concerns, especially during the global pandemic.

To get this unprecedented crisis under control, we need clear leadership.

LACK OF LEADERSHIP

But the Biden administration has made some critical missteps which have led to internal finger-pointing.

President Biden passed the buck in March to Vice President Harris. But her team recently tried to distance her from the crisis and since taking over, she has not been to our southern border.

This week she met with the heads of Guatemala and Mexico, but as our point person, she **MUST** do more. It's not a joke or laughing matter.

Unfortunately, HHS has also had its challenges, especially when it comes to addressing the unprecedented flow of unaccompanied children.

Our brave border patrol officials and workers caring for unaccompanied children deserve applause and our support – particularly given the unprecedented nature of this ongoing crisis.

HYPOCRISY

Sadly, Democrats who were once outraged by overcrowded border patrol facilities and ORR facilities housing unaccompanied children have largely remained silent.

Democrats who previously decried ORR facilities used in the last administration – some even compared them to “concentration camps” – now remain silent, despite this administration using the very same facilities.

And those that criticized conditions of facilities holding unaccompanied children during the last administration are nowhere to be found when it comes to recent allegations of abuse, neglect, and failures to properly vet staff by this administration.

This administration must acknowledge the border crisis – and it is time Democrats find their voice again on these issues.

Our witness today is only one piece of the broader issue at our southern border.

While our discussion today will focus on ORR--- which is responsible for coordinating and implementing the care and placement of unaccompanied children with appropriate sponsors-- - we expect this administration to do more across the board to secure our borders.

This moment calls for real leadership.

I look forward to today's discussion. I yield back.