

Good evening! Welcome to the first joint Oversight and Investigations and Health Subcommittee field hearing examining President Biden's border crisis.

It is important we convene here in Texas to shed light on the brutal and unsustainable conditions this President's administration has caused at our border.

No other country in the world operates its borders in the manner this Administration has chosen.

According to a recent January 2023 Pew Research report, "Monthly encounters between U.S. Border Patrol agents and migrants attempting to cross into the United States at the U.S.-Mexico border remain at levels not seen in more than two decades."

There were more than 206,000 reported encounters in November 2022, according to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

For context, the highest number of reported encounters in the previous Administration was 132,856.

The flood of migrants takes our customs and border agents away from stopping the cartels and narcotics from being trafficked into our country. Substances such as fentanyl and fentanyl analogues are killing Americans on a daily basis.

In 2022 alone, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency seized over 379 million doses of fentanyl, which is enough to kill every American.

We must pass the HALT Fentanyl Act, I have championed along with Representative Latta. This bill would permanently schedule fentanyl analogues as Schedule I.

As one McAllen, Texas border patrol representative told reporters at Fox News: “We joined to stop all those statistics, the fentanyl, the rapists, the murderers, the molesters, and those people are still out there . . . If I'm over here with 100 women and kids... that's going to take hours of my time, and my partner's time.”

While that is understandable, after all, we want to help these vulnerable people. We must also address other issues at our southern border. Among those is the release of unaccompanied children.

The HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement, or ORR, is responsible for overseeing and safeguarding the thousands of unaccompanied children coming across our border.

The administration's apathy to securing the borders has caused the number of children the ORR is charged with looking after to skyrocket from 1,929 children in October 2020 to 20,339 children in April 2021.

I have had serious concerns about what ORR considers to be background checks.

In 2021, I visited the Emergency Intake operation at Fort Bliss, Texas, and was both shocked and disappointed at what I learned there.

There was no collaboration with law enforcement for background checks when vetting sponsors and the "public records check" they were using were widely available internet search engines.

A September 2022 Inspector General study related to the operation at Fort Bliss solidified my concerns.

The study concluded case managers lacked sufficient child welfare training and were ineffective at reuniting children with parents/sponsors; one interviewee informed the Inspector General there was a “‘pervasive sense of despair’ among children at the facility who reportedly experienced distress, anxiety, and in some cases, panic attacks.”

The Inspector General reported on instances of children physically harming themselves due to case manager negligence.

Additionally, the Inspector General’s report found that at Fort Bliss, ORR “eliminat[ed] critical safeguards from the sponsor screening process” thereby “potentially increasing children’s risk of release to unsafe sponsors.”

Further, the Inspector General found ORR supervisors had grown concerned that policy changes prioritized fast tracking release of unaccompanied children to sponsors quickly, rather than taking the steps to “vet sponsors and protect children from risks such as trafficking and exploitation.”

Supervisors also reported that inexperienced ORR case managers “failed to consider children’s significant history of abuse and neglect or whether sex offenders resided in the potential sponsor’s household.”

The Administration’s border neglect is not limited to poisoning Americans and undercutting our border patrol agents, but the White House’s immigration policies are essentially printing billions of dollars for Mexican cartels, who have dramatically increased profits in their human trafficking business.

Homeland Security Investigations estimates the human trafficking industry generates about \$13 billion dollars today, up from \$500 million in 2018.

According to border patrol sources “criminal organizations trafficking women, children, families, and single adults over the US-Mexico border earned as much as \$14 million a day in February 2021.”

The disastrous impacts to this country’s health as a result of this Administration’s policies must stop. This Committee will shed light on this national emergency, even if the White House continues to ignore it.

I appreciate the opportunity to hold this hearing tonight and looking forward to working towards solutions to solves these issues.