

IMMIGRATION

Cost of the migrant crisis: Why Denver's neighbors have had enough

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Denver, Colorado, a self-described “sanctuary city,” has cared for more than 41,000 illegal immigrants over the past two years. The new arrivals have drained city

resources and led to resentment from locals. The same can be said for other blue cities across the United States. This Washington Examiner series, **Cost of the Migrant Crisis**, will investigate the strain on cities, schools, and healthcare within Denver in particular. **Part Four** is about the backlash the city is facing from surrounding areas. To read **Part Three**, the pressure on hospitals, [click here](#). To read **Part Two** on schools, [click here](#). To read **Part One**, [click here](#).

CASTLE PINES, Colorado — A hard no.

That's the message several counties around the **Denver** metro area delivered to **Colorado's** capital city after it welcomed more than **41,424 illegal immigrants** in less than two years.

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ICE buying robot dogs to help in Trump immigration enforcement operations



Trump administration begins deportations of Haitians — slowly



ICE deports right-wing political commentator Milo Yiannopoulos to United Kingdom



A group of people approaching cars at a Denver intersection for windshield washes, April 26, 2024. (Barnini Chakraborty/Washington Examiner)

They view Denver, a city of 710,000 residents that has spent an estimated \$120 million taking care of the border crossers, as a cautionary tale and don't want its migrant crisis, which has nearly depleted city resources, to become theirs.



Cautionary tale: Counties blame Denver for open arms

Douglas County, El Paso County, Weld County, and Aurora have all taken steps to prevent officials from using funds for undocumented migrant services. All have made it known that they have no plans to take in any migrants, arguing their budgets will buckle under the strain.

Douglas and El Paso went a step further and **sued the state** and its Democratic governor, alleging that two laws prohibiting local governments from working with federal authorities on immigration enforcement violate Colorado's Constitution.

COST OF THE MIGRANT CRISIS: DENVER HOSPITALS BUCKLE UNDER VOLUME OF PATIENTS

"I don't blame the Venezuelan migrants," **Douglas County Commissioner Abe Laydon** told the *Washington Examiner*. "I blame bad public policy because Denver held up a big sign saying 'Welcome.' When you put that big welcome sign on your state and on your city, I don't blame Venezuelan migrants for saying, 'Well, they said it was a sanctuary city.'"

Alyssa Gross, a retail worker in Douglas County, believes the reasons behind the county's actions are more

nefarious than elected officials are letting on.



“People will talk about our population being too high, how inflation affects us, housing, all of that, but at the end of the day, if the migrants were white, it would not be an issue,” she told the *Washington Examiner*.



Alyssa Gross, April 25, 2024. (Barnini Chakraborty/Washington Examiner)

Laydon, a Denver native and Douglas County’s first Latino commissioner, strongly disagrees. He said he’s aware of how the county comes across to outsiders but insists its motives are being misrepresented.

“It does not mean that we aren’t compassionate and it does not mean we don’t care about the plight of those seeking asylum,” he said. “It means that we are prioritizing legal citizens first, including legal immigrants, including people of color.”

COST OF THE MIGRANT CRISIS: DENVER SCHOOLS TESTED TO THEIR LIMIT

Laydon recently met with a Venezuelan migrant in his district named Gheiber. Gheiber came to Douglas County with his mother several years ago. Both of his uncles had been assassinated and his mother was almost abducted twice. When he arrived in Douglas County, he went through the proper immigration channels and was welcomed.

“He has a bit of an accent and people would say, ‘Where are you from?’ and he would say, ‘Venezuela,’ and the response was, ‘Fantastic, wonderful, great!’” Laydon said. “Fast forward to 2024 and he’s getting harassment, persecution, people frowning and scowling in certain circumstances. His comment to us is that it has impaired the rights of legal immigrants the most.”



Douglas County Commissioner Abe Laydon, April 25, 2024. (Barnini Chakraborty/Washington Examiner)

Most Coloradans agreed that immigration is a critical concern but were divided on how to address it, according to [a poll](#) by the independent Colorado Polling Institute.

Sixty-two percent of 632 likely voters referred to the situation at the U.S. southern border as a “crisis” or “major problem.”



While Congress and [President Joe Biden](#) got some of the blame, nearly one-third of voters pointed to Denver’s own open arms policy for feeding the crisis. Fifty-one percent said Colorado’s resources are being “overwhelmed” taking care of illegal immigrants and that they should be turned away, while 49% said they should be met with compassion and allowed to stay.

COST OF THE MIGRANT CRISIS: DENVER’S ROCKY ROAD AS A SANCTUARY CITY

Douglas County resident Lynne Clements said she’s heard people referring to the illegal immigrants as “criminals.”

“We’re the eighth richest county in the United States of America,” she said. “I feel we have a moral obligation to be welcoming to people who have come from a country that we have no idea about, living in Douglas County.”

‘Money pit’: Frustration boils over in Lakewood

Residents in Lakewood, a town seven miles west of Denver, had a different view.

Their frustration over the migrant crisis has reached a boiling point, with people packing city council meetings to air their views.

“We don’t have the tax base to handle it,” one angry resident said during the seven-hour meeting. “It’s a money pit and you guys are responsible for our money. Don’t screw it up. You guys are famous for screwing things up!”

Another resident called out, “The citizens of Lakewood are drowning and you’re talking about adding more water!”



Colorado’s third most populous city, Aurora, reaffirmed its status as a non-sanctuary city in February, asserting that it “does not currently have the financial capacity to fund new services related to this crisis.”

Like Lakewood, **several residents** came out to have their voices heard.

Nayda Benitez said her family migrated to Colorado out of necessity and found it “incredibly infuriating” to hear the city council push an anti-immigrant resolution.

One resident, who supported the resolution, blasted others for having “no clue.”

“I get angry when people sit here and think we can feed every person in the world that pours across our southern border,” he said. “We simply cannot afford it. It will bankrupt our city.”

Jon Ewing, a Denver spokesman, told the *Washington Examiner* the whipped-up frenzy over illegal immigrants is unfounded and that Denver has not diverted busloads of undocumented migrants to places like Douglas County.

“We haven’t and we won’t,” he said.

Window washers pushing patience

In Denver, some residents and business owners said their patience with the newcomers has been running thin. Many have flooded medians to offer windshield-washing services — washing first without asking and then demanding money.

“They washed my car four times!” resident Penelope Waters told the *Washington Examiner*. “I get to an intersection and pray the light isn’t red. It’s awful!”

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At its height, the illegal immigrants that came to Denver erected rows of tents near pricey apartment buildings, in the parking lot of an amusement park, or anywhere else they could. Several stood in medians begging for money, stalked customers at grocery stores, offering to carry their bags for them for a price, and acted as vehicle watchers, charging drivers at public parking lots money to keep their cars safe.



*Denver migrants offering windshield washes at intersections, April 26, 2024.
(Barnini Chakraborty/Washington Examiner)*

"I can't begrudge someone who stands on the corner for seven hours a day to make \$7 to feed his family," Waters said. "I also shouldn't be made to feel bad if I don't want to empty my wallet and give all my money away to everyone that asks every time I go to the store or run an errand."

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