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Surveillance
Immigration Integrity, Security, and
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Constitution and Limited Government

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BUDGET COMMITTEE

CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

HEARING STATEMENT

THE BIDEN BORDER CRISIS: EXPLOITATION OF UNACCOMPANIED ALIEN CHILDREN

APRIL 26, 2023



- Thank you, Chairman McClintock and Ranking Member Jayapal, for convening this hearing today.
- Let me welcome our witnesses:
 - Tara Lee Rodas, Health and Human Services Whistleblower, Federal Inspector General Employee

- Sheena Rodriguez, Founder and President, Alliance for a Safe Texas
- Jessica Vaughn, Director of Policy Studies, Center for Immigration Studies
- **Robert Carey, Principle - Migration Works LLC** (Office of Refugee Resettlement Director during Obama administration)
- Let me just say that this hearing should be focusing on looking for viable solutions to end the exploitation of unaccompanied children – not using their plight as a political ploy and attack against our current Administration.
- The horrific circumstances that endanger children who have fallen victim to our broken immigration system should be impetus for us to act and pass meaningful and effective immigration legislation.
- The countless instances of child abuse, exploitation, and sponsor vetting issues are unacceptable and cannot be highlighted enough for us to truly take heed and action to end their tragedies happening on our watch.
- These vulnerable children are at risk of being trafficked, abused, or subjected to other forms of harm as they navigate the complex and often dangerous journey to the US border.
- Once they arrive, they face further challenges as they navigate the US immigration system and attempt to reunite with family members or sponsors.
- The illegal employment of children by companies in the United States is a serious concern that has been documented in various

industries, including agriculture, domestic work, and construction.

- Unaccompanied children, who may lack legal status and access to education and other resources, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse in the workplace.
- Since 2018, there has been a 69 percent increase in the illegal employment of children by companies in the United States.
- According to the US Department of Labor, it is illegal to employ children under the age of 14 in most non-agricultural jobs, and there are strict regulations in place to protect the safety and well-being of minors in the workplace.
- However, some employers may violate these laws by hiring children under the table, paying them below minimum wage, or exposing them to hazardous conditions.
- Unaccompanied children who take on dangerous jobs may face a range of risks, including physical injury, exposure to toxic chemicals or other hazards, and psychological trauma.
- They may also be subject to long hours, unpaid overtime, and other forms of exploitation.
- Efforts to combat the illegal employment of children in the US include increased enforcement of labor laws, outreach to vulnerable communities, and education and training for employers and workers.
- Advocates also call for stronger protections for immigrant children, including access to legal representation and support services, to help prevent exploitation and ensure their rights are protected.

- Rather than trying to address this problem, Republicans in Congress and around the country are advancing legislation to make it worse.
- Republicans in Congress have proposed legislation that would make it more difficult for unaccompanied children to access legal protections and increase the risk of exploitation.
- For example, H.R. 1183, the *Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act of 2023* would eliminate the requirement for HHS to provide unaccompanied children with legal counsel, making it more difficult for them to navigate the complex immigration system and assert their rights.
- Additionally, this wayward bill would make it easier to deport children to countries where they may be at risk of harm.
- H.R. 2640, the *Border Security and Enforcement Act of 2023* is another incredibly misguided proposed bill that just passed out of this committee last week, and it includes many harmful changes to the current system for unaccompanied children (UACs) crossing the border.
- Under this bill, all unaccompanied children would be subject to a summary removal process, which would give them even fewer protections than current law provides for unaccompanied minors from contiguous countries like Mexico.
- H.R. 2640 would eliminate the right of many children to seek protection in immigration court from human trafficking and other dangers, leaving them with only cursory screenings by law enforcement personnel lacking child welfare expertise.

- The incredulous bill would also bar existing efforts to provide government-paid counsel to unaccompanied children and subjects all unaccompanied children to an expedited screening and removal process, giving them just 14 days to prepare their case without a government-provided attorney.
- Additionally, the bill prohibits anyone who entered the United States between ports of entry (unless they were interdicted at sea) from being able to seek asylum – notwithstanding the Majority’s rejection of multiple amendments that would have exempted unaccompanied children from this restriction.
- Whereas, Democrats have proposed a range of solutions to address the humanitarian crisis at the border and improve protections for unaccompanied children.
- These proposals include increasing funding for HHS and DHS to ensure that unaccompanied children are properly cared for, and their sponsors are thoroughly vetted, expanding access to legal counsel for these children, and addressing the root causes of migration from Central America through diplomatic and development initiatives.
- Democrats also support comprehensive immigration reform that would create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and improve border security measures while respecting the rights and dignity of all individuals.
- In March 2021, President Biden signed a memorandum creating a task force to reunite families separated at the U.S.-Mexico border during the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy. The task force is composed of officials from several agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

- Democrats have proposed legislation, such as the Dream Act and the American Dream and Promise Act, that would provide a pathway to citizenship for young undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children, also known as Dreamers.
- In July 2021, the House passed a bill that would create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented farmworkers and their families, called the Farm Workforce Modernization Act.
- This would protect workers from exploitation and abuse and would provide stability for the agricultural industry.
- Democrats have advocated for a comprehensive immigration reform package that would address the root causes of migration, improve border security, and create legal pathways for people to enter the U.S. lawfully.
- In September 2021, the Biden administration announced plans to increase the number of refugees admitted to the U.S. annually, following a historic low under the previous administration.
- This move would provide opportunities for people who are fleeing violence and persecution to find safety and stability in the U.S.
- Over the years, the Democrat party is making sure that these unaccompanied children stay safe and have a legal documentation in the United States, while the Republican party sadly has steadfastly opposed all the legislations that benefits these children.
- I ask my colleagues to come together and move past the discord and to stand true to our ideals as Americans and protect our most vulnerable – to protect all children who come to us in need.