



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Hearing Statement of Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement & Intelligence Subcommittee Ranking Member Seth Magaziner (D-RI)

### *Republican Border "Hearing" #745*

**July 26, 2023**

Migration from South and Central America to the United States is a great humanitarian challenge. The migrants coming to our Southern Border are escaping poverty and political persecution to build a better life.

They want to work, to contribute to our economy, and build a future for their children free from fear. Just like my ancestors, who fled poverty in Ireland and Eastern Europe. Just like the pilgrims who escaped persecution and landed at Plymouth colony. Just like the ancestors of most people in this room. They see the United States as a beacon of hope, because that is what we have always been.

We are the greatest nation in the world because we are the shining City on the Hill that has said to the world, "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free." And in many cases, the migrants coming to the Southern border in search of a better life, are seeking to come to our country legally.

I'll say it again: in many cases, they are seeking to come legally, because under our laws in many cases the migrants are entitled to legal asylum.

Unfortunately, many migrants, on their journey to the United States face danger from drug cartels, human traffickers, and gun smugglers. Human smugglers charge extortionary fees, and sometimes leave migrants trapped to die in sweltering cargo containers at the side of the road. Women and children have been kidnapped and assaulted. And even when migrants are able to avoid abusive cartels, many die on their arduous journey. And those fortunate enough to complete the journey to our border, are met with a system in which it can take weeks or months for their legal asylum claims to be processed.

Dying of thirst, starvation, and disease, and running out of time, some seek to enter the country between legal points of entry, out of sheer desperation.

And of course, it is not just migrants who have fallen victim to the cartels, the human traffickers, and the gun smugglers. American citizens have suffered too.

Ms. Tambunga, what you have suffered is unimaginable. I am deeply sorry for the loss of your mother, Maria, and your daughter, Emilia. And I thank you for your willingness and bravery to share your story with us today.

I read in an interview you gave you said "I just need this to not happen again to anybody else. I need it to not happen to another mother." And that you want action, not words. We could not agree with you more – your call to action is desperately needed. We owe it to you, and to all of the victims of the

humanitarian crisis at the border to set aside politics and work together in a bipartisan manner to pass comprehensive immigration reform and border security measures.

We need a more orderly and streamlined system at ports of entry, so that migrants can have their legal asylum claims processed without having to wait for weeks or months in squalid camps or become dependent on human traffickers to sneak them between points of entry.

In my conversation with Border Patrol leadership they were clear that they support a more streamlined system for migrants to seek legal asylum at ports of entry, so that Border Patrol can be freed up to focus its efforts on the bad actors smuggling guns and drugs between ports of entry.

We need to build on the work of the last Congress to increase staffing at the border, both at and in between ports of entry, and to improve technology to detect illegal crossings and contraband.

The Biden Administration has begun this work. New technology and enhanced staffing authorized in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress is being deployed across the border as we speak. Illegal crossings are down significantly since the expiration of Title 42. The CBP One app is succeeding in creating a more orderly system at ports of entry and is in turn reducing crossing between ports of entry. There is more work to do, but the path ahead is clear. Bipartisan solutions instead of political grandstanding.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, but first I have to make one last, very important point:

We will never defeat the evil of the cartels and the traffickers by adopting their cruel tactics or retreating from our American values. At least 5,500 children were separated under the Trump Administration, and there is likely more that we still don't know about. **5,500 children.**

Of those 5,500 children more than 500 were under 5 years old. As a new parent myself, this is just unconscionable. And it should outrage everyone here. And today, years later, there are still hundreds of children who have not been reunited with their parents.

One woman named Jessica, fleeing El Salvador and seeking asylum in America after MS-13 beat her and threatened to kill her and her children, arrived to the United States in 2018 – only to have the Trump Administration take away her 4 and 10 year old sons. Their story is part of the human cost of the humanitarian crisis at the border.

It is also despicable that the Governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, sent agents to Texas to fool migrants into coming to Florida so that he could send them to Massachusetts as a political stunt.

This article details the story of 22-year-old Eduardo, his wife, and their 7-year-old daughter who endured abduction and beatings by a Mexican cartel as they journeyed from Peru toward the U.S.-Mexico border, in search of a better life.

When Eduardo and his family reached the U.S., they applied for legal asylum and stayed at a migrant center while awaiting the processing of their application. Then, they met a woman, working for Ron DeSantis, who lied to them, promising a job and shelter if they would board a flight to Massachusetts. Of course, the Massachusetts authorities were never alerted to this plot. And Florida taxpayers paid for this disgusting stunt by the Florida Governor for his political gain.

Children taken from their parents by grandstanding politicians looking for headlines. Grieving parents who still do not know where their children are today.

And now another grandstanding politician, Texas Governor Greg Abbott, has launched an operation in which agents were allegedly ordered to push children into the Rio Grande River, and deny water to migrants. This is not who we are. And it does not make anyone safer.

So, when we talk about the human cost of the border crisis – don't forget these humans. Children, parents, separated, kidnapped and hurt by grandstanding politicians looking for headlines. Cowardly, selfish, politicians kidnapping children because they think it would make a good tweet.

So, I and the Democrats on my subcommittee, will work with anyone who is serious about making the border safer for American citizens and for migrants. We will work with anyone to protect American citizens, but we will also not stand by while selfish politicians make the humanitarian crisis worse by abusing migrants seeking a better life. We can build an immigration system that is safe, fair, and orderly if we put politics aside and work together.

# # #

Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978