

# An update from the southern border

By U.S. Rep. Scott Fitzgerald

If you've tuned into the news lately, you've likely heard about the crisis unfolding at our southern border ever since President Biden took office, and there are no signs of this crisis slowing down.

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection just released their June report, and the numbers paint a concerning picture. CBP reported the highest number of enforcement encounters at our southern border in 21 years, clocking in at 188,829 encounters. This is a 450% increase from last June and the fourth straight month of 170,000-plus apprehensions. Not to mention, 1,053 pounds of fentanyl was seized at the southwest border in June, more than the last three Junes combined.



Fitzgerald

These numbers come as no surprise, though. President Biden halted construction of the border wall, brought back catch and release, and got rid of the Remain in Mexico policy. Next, he's expected to roll back Title 42, public health protections that allow for the quick processing and expulsion of migrants who illegally cross the border.

This administration's rhetoric and policies are what have enabled levels of border crossings not seen in decades and fentanyl seizures that have already outpaced the entire year of 2020. As Democrats remain silent, ignoring this major issue, I traveled down to McAllen, Texas, to witness the ongoing situation at our southern border firsthand.

My first stop was at the Custom and Border Patrol's Donna Processing Facility, a temporary facility used to process individuals in U.S. Border Patrol custody and provide processing capacity along the Rio Grande Valley. The scenes at this site were shocking. Huge white tents were filled with children and mothers covered in foil blankets while they waited anywhere from 42 to 72 hours for their cases to be sorted through.

I had a chance to speak with border agents there who manage the operations, and one thing I heard repeatedly was that the flow of people at the southern border has dramatically increased since President Biden took office, and there are no signs of this trend slowing.

After touring the Donna Processing Facility, we traveled to a temporary outdoor processing site built under an overpass to control the overflow of individuals crossing into McAllen, Texas. Much of the work Border Patrol agents do here is sorting the bad actors from the children and young adults. But to call this site a facility would be an overstatement. The infrastructure built here consisted of nothing more than canvas tents and wooden stalls. It was an unbelievable sight to see and to hear from agents how stretched thin our border operations have become.

That evening, I had the opportunity to tour the southern border after sunset, where I witnessed when and how many individuals make their journey across the U.S. border. The Border Patrol agents leading the tour echoed again what I had been hearing all day: The flow of migrants into our country has increased to unmanageable levels.

As we walked along the border, I learned more about the tactics Mexican drug cartels use to smuggle in illicit substances like fentanyl. A border agent described the diversion tactics they use: The cartel sends a boat of people into the middle of the river to occupy the attention of Border Patrol agents, meanwhile the cartels send in another boat with drugs along a different river route. Sometimes, cartels will even transport people and drugs in the same boat. If the Border Patrol closes in, the cartels will push some of their human cargo into the water, forcing the Border Patrol to stop their pursuit in order to save people from drowning. Meanwhile, the cartel members make their escape.

These tactics are particularly alarming considering reports that drug overdose deaths in Wisconsin increased by more than 25 percent last year, a number we're on record to beat again this year.

The evening border tour was truly eye-opening. At different points along our tour, groups of up to 50 migrants would appear out of the woods in search of the southern border checkpoint. These migrants know, with the Remain in Mexico policy no longer in place, they can claim asylum and travel to almost anywhere in the United States. As I waited at the airport before returning home, I saw for myself, there were countless groups and individuals with big manila envelopes, instructions in hand, and ready to depart to different areas across the country.

What I saw in McAllen, Texas, confirmed what's happening down at our southern border is absolutely a crisis. The law enforcement officials and border agents I spoke to all expressed the same concern: The flow of drugs and migrants across the border is rapidly increasing and we need more border agents to mitigate the problem.

It is a humanitarian crisis. It is a national security crisis, and it's exasperating a crisis that has plagued this country for many years: the opioid epidemic. We need solutions and I'm working in Congress to pass them. I introduced the SOFA Act alongside Senator Ron Johnson to close a loophole in current law that the Government Accountability Office found would reduce incentives for cartels to circumvent the law through new and existing fentanyl substances.

Republicans have also sought to have conversations here in Congress. Months ago, I joined nine of my colleagues on the Judiciary Committee in sending a letter to Chairwoman Sheila Jackson Lee, demanding a hearing on the border crisis so we could begin to identify solutions.

Most recently, I joined my colleague Rep. Tom Tiffany in sending a letter to Governor Evers urging him to send National Guard resources to Texas and Arizona to manage the crisis at the southern border. We've received no response to either letter.

President Biden and Speaker Pelosi must take this situation seriously if we are to have any hope of securing our southern border. Unfortunately, their refusal to even admit that a crisis exists means that any resolution will be an uphill battle.

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