

# WALL STREET JOURNAL

## MIGRANT SURGE JAMS BORDER

By Ana Campoy  
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HIDALGO COUNTY, Texas – Sgt. Dan Broyles once had to battle through the spiky thicket of border vegetation here to find an immigrant illegally sneaking into the country.

But all he had to do on a recent day was to wait in plain sight along a dirt road, as a group of seven Salvadoran migrants, including a 6-year-old girl with a pink Hello Kitty backpack, deliberately walked up and surrendered to him a mile north of the Rio Grande.

“They’re all giving up,” said Sgt. Broyles, 51 years old, a Hidalgo County Constable’s official whose main responsibility is supposed to be serving court papers. As he waited for Border Patrol agents to pick up the migrants, another group was coming up behind them.

Frustration is mounting along the Texas border as federal officials struggle to check a surge of Central Americans illegally crossing into the state – an influx critics say is being aggravated because the Obama administration is allowing more migrants, primarily women traveling with children, to be released into the U.S. pending deportation proceedings.

The Department of Homeland Security hasn’t disclosed statistics on how many immigrants it has released. But the agency has confirmed that due to a shortage of detention space in Texas, it has shipped hundreds of immigrants recently apprehended in Texas to Arizona for processing, and subsequently dropped some off at bus stations there, allowing them to travel to locations around the country until they can be deported.

That has angered Republican Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer, who sent a letter to President Barack Obama on June 2 asking that he “end this dangerous and unconscionable policy immediately.”

A Homeland Security spokeswoman said some families pending deportation proceedings were being let go under an existing program that allows alternatives to detention, not a new policy, and all remain targets for eventual deportation.

Rep. Henry Cuellar, a Democrat who represents part of the Texas border region, said he was informed that 8,000 immigrants have been let go in the Rio Grande Valley in recent months, with an additional 3,300 freed in other border communities. “What we’re seeing now is almost a Cuban policy by de facto,” he said, alluding to the U.S. policy allowing Cuban exiles to legally remain in the U.S. if they touch land in the country.

Vice President Joe Biden is planning to travel to Guatemala this week and meet top officials from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras on the issue of unaccompanied children, a senior administration official said Sunday. The Obama administration is looking at ways to “enhance” its support to these Central American countries and will also urge parents to “think twice” about sending children on a dangerous journey that doesn’t result in long-term residency in the U.S., the official said.

The Obama administration has stepped up deportations at the border in recent years as the number of illegal immigrant apprehensions has risen. The Department of Homeland Security reported 235,093 border deportations last fiscal year, up from 151,893 four years earlier.

In the past eight months, 162,751 immigrants from countries other than Mexico were apprehended along the Southwest border, already surpassing the 148,988 caught in the prior fiscal year ending in September according to the Border Patrol. Roughly three-fourths were caught in the Rio Grande Valley, the shortest route into the U.S. from Central America.

The number of unaccompanied minors caught crossing the border has nearly doubled during the same period, to 47,017, and federal authorities expect it to double again by year's end, creating what the Obama administration has deemed a humanitarian crisis. The vast majority, 33,470, have been caught in the Rio Grande Valley.

Federal, state and local authorities have countered this month with a flood of additional law enforcement officers, local officials who are participating in the operations said. But the sheer volume of migrants is overwhelming the ability of the Department of Homeland Security to detain and process them, Border Patrol union representatives say.

Local officials say they expect immigrants to continue coming by the thousands until Congress clarifies what immigration policy will be in the future. The new arrivals are putting more pressure on the already overtaxed immigration court system, they say, undermining the federal government's ability to deport them. The backlog of pending immigration cases has steadily grown in the past few years to more than 350,000 in the year ended Sept. 30, 2013.

A Texas Department of Public Safety report obtained by The Wall Street Journal said more than 8,300 people were apprehended by the Border Patrol in the Rio Grande Valley in one week, from May 28 to June 4. At least 8 percent of the immigrants were first detained by Texas law enforcement officials, it said.

Instead of fleeing from authorities, many women and children illegally crossing the border are voluntarily turning themselves in, Texas police say. Homeland Security officials are releasing some at bus stations, with a mandate to report to immigration authorities within 15 days.

Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson told Washington lawmakers last week that the department is committed to enforcing current immigration law, but that its response is "no substitute for comprehensive immigration reform."

"Those apprehended at our border are priorities for removal," he said Thursday. "They are priorities for enforcement of our immigration laws regardless of age."

The already shaky prospects for immigration legislation appeared to dim further in Congress after House Majority Leader Eric Cantor lost his party's nomination to an opponent who campaigned on an anti-immigration message.

Under U.S. law, the federal government is required to care for unaccompanied minors, and has started housing immigrant children in military facilities as far away as California in response to the Texas influx.

Meanwhile, frustration is building on the front lines of the immigration fight as Texas law enforcement officials say the volume of illegal human smuggling is creating spillover effects

north of the border, including a rise in stash houses to hide immigrants, auto theft and communicable diseases.

In Peñitas, a border town with fewer than 5,000 residents, police recently pulled a patrol car from circulation after it was used to transport an immigrant infected with scabies. Last week, the department received a report of a stolen white sedan—taken from a fenced Border Patrol facility where a high-tech surveillance blimp is tethered, said Investigator Alex Perez. The car was recovered and a suspect arrested.

Two immigrants detained by Peñitas police, brothers Francisco Javier Tejada, 21, and Christian de Jesus Tejada, 13, left El Salvador after the MS-13 criminal gang threatened to kill them if they didn't join, the older Mr. Tejada said. It took them 11 days and a \$7,000 fee per head to be delivered to the U.S. side of the Rio Grande.

When they spotted a Peñitas police officer on patrol, they approached him, their ID's in hand. Back home they had heard on TV that they could get a permit to stay if they made it in.

"I want to study to become someone in the world," the younger brother said. He had just finished 7th grade.