



ISSUE BRIEF | America First Governors' Council

# CONSERVATIVE GOVERNORS TAKE ACTION ON THE BORDER

*Governor Bobby Jindal and Rachel Wallen Oglesby*

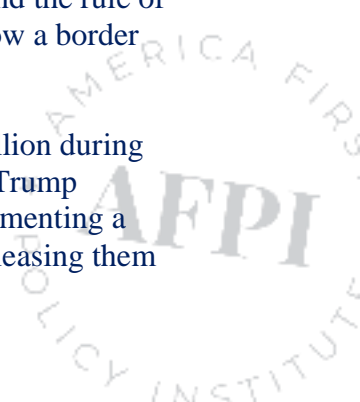
## TOPLINE POINTS

- Conservative governors have responded to the Biden Administration's border crisis by deploying more than 9,400 guardsmen and law enforcement, and enacting other measures to bolster border security and combat illegal immigration in their own states.
- Conservative governors have coordinated efforts through joint communications and policy proposals to present state-level solutions to the historic border crisis.
- Together, these efforts have resulted in the seizing of 7,000+ pounds of drugs, 300+ firearms, and 10,000+ ammunition rounds and the rescue of at least eight trafficked children, according to initial results from the American Governors Border Strike Force, along with heightened awareness of the crisis among the American people.

## Introduction

The United States is being overrun by an influx of illegal aliens, human trafficking, drugs, and other criminal activity flooding across the southern border. The Biden Administration's policies created this crisis, and President Biden has refused to use existing executive authority to secure the border. The administration's disregard for the well-being of American citizens and the rule of law has put everyone, wherever they live in this country, in danger. Every state is now a border state.

As of April 2024, nationwide border apprehensions had reached a staggering 9.9 million during the Biden Administration, dwarfing the 2.2 million apprehensions during the entire Trump Administration. This record-high number is due to the Biden Administration's implementing a nationwide catch-and-release scheme that prioritizes processing illegal aliens and releasing them



into American communities. The Trump Administration, by contrast, focused on detention, deterrence, and imposing consequences.

Compounding the crisis are the estimated 1.6 million known “gotaways” who have unlawfully entered the country and managed to evade capture since 2021. In addition, the border has quickly become a gateway for national security threats, with U.S. Border Patrol reporting encounters with 362 known or suspected terrorists at the southern border since fiscal year 2021, compared to just 11 between fiscal years 2017 and 2020. Equally alarming are the record number of opioid deaths over the past three years and the record 64,000 pounds of illicit fentanyl seized at the southern border—enough to kill every American 18 times over.

Lastly, the surge in unaccompanied alien children has been a major concern, with more than 510,000 apprehensions recorded during the Biden Administration. The administration’s deliberate decision to end DNA testing for children traveling with adults—along with other policy decisions, such as relaxing vetting procedures for child sponsors in the U.S.—has significantly worsened the child trafficking and smuggling crisis on the border.

In contrast, an America First border security policy prioritizes robust border security measures that finish the border wall system, end human trafficking, and defeat the drug cartels. Because of the Biden Administration’s deliberate policy decisions, the safety of the American people is increasingly dependent on strong state leadership. In the past three and a half years, many conservative governors have recognized that to protect their citizens, they must take unprecedented steps to address the border crisis actively.

### **Deploying Personnel and Visiting the Border**

One significant way that governors have stepped up is by sending guardsmen and law enforcement personnel to help protect the border. Twenty-six Republican governors<sup>1</sup> have collectively deployed more than 9,400 personnel to the southern border from 2021 to present, including Army and Air Force National Guardsmen and state law enforcement officers, along with helicopters, drones, aerial equipment, and other tools. All governors have pointed to the significant impact illegal immigration and drug trafficking have had in their states, even those thousands of miles from the southern border.

At the forefront of this effort, of course, is Texas Governor Greg Abbott. Through Operation Lone Star, Governor Abbott has mobilized more than 3,000 National Guardsmen and state troopers, detecting and repelling illegal crossings, arresting smugglers and cartel members, and seizing deadly drugs like fentanyl. Since the launch of Operation Lone Star, Governor Abbott’s office has reported more than 500,000 apprehensions of illegal aliens and nearly 40,000 criminal arrests, along with the seizure of more than 467 million lethal doses of fentanyl.

<sup>1</sup> Alabama Governor Ivey, Alaska Governor Dunleavy, former Arizona Governor Ducey, Arkansas Governor Sanders, former Arkansas Governor Hutchinson, Florida Governor DeSantis, Georgia Governor Kemp, Idaho Governor Little, Indiana Governor Holcomb, Iowa Governor Reynolds, Louisiana Governor Landry, Missouri Governor Parson, Montana Governor Gianforte, Nebraska Governor Pillen, New Hampshire Governor Sununu, North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum, Ohio Governor DeWine, Oklahoma Governor Stitt, South Carolina Governor McMaster, South Dakota Governor Noem, Tennessee Governor Lee, Texas Governor Abbott, Utah Governor Cox, Virginia Governor Youngkin, West Virginia Governor Justice, Wyoming Governor Gordon.



Beyond Texas, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has led the charge, committing over 2,100 guardsmen and law enforcement to help secure the border, while South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem has scheduled eight deployments of guardsmen since 2021, the most of any governor outside of a border state. Governors have also provided equipment to help secure the border, including helicopters, drones and drone operators, weapons, and additional vessels. While previous presidents have, at times, mobilized National Guard troops to help secure the border, the last few years represent a shift, as governors have consistently stepped up to deploy their guardsmen in the absence of a federal request.

In addition, 23 governors<sup>2</sup> have made numerous solo and group trips to the border to assess the situation firsthand, with a combined 48 visits to the border over the past three and a half years. This stands in stark contrast to leadership at the federal level. President Biden has only visited the border twice during his presidency, and both visits were highly staged and near sections of the border that were experiencing minimal unlawful crossings at the time of the trips. Likewise, Vice President Kamala Harris has visited the southern border just one time, despite being named the administration’s “border czar” back in March 2021.

### Legislative and Executive Action

Beyond deployments and trips to the border, 15 governors have pursued legislative and executive action to keep their states safe, in addition to the consistent and numerous actions taken by Governor Abbott to protect Texas. Table 1 depicts many of the actions taken in these states.

*Table 1: Legislative and executive actions taken by non-border states to help secure the border.*

State	Governor	Legislative or Executive Action	Details
Alaska	Mike Dunleavy	Legislative	<u>Funding requested</u>
Arkansas	Sarah Sanders	Executive	<u>Op-ed about her experience at the border</u> (2023)
Arkansas	Sarah Sanders	Legislative	<u>HB 1456</u> (2023)
Florida	Ron DeSantis	Executive	<u>Formed a strike force of state/local law enforcement to combat trafficking</u> (2022)
Florida	Ron DeSantis	Legislative	<u>SB 1808</u> (2022), <u>SB 1718</u> (2023), <u>SB 1036</u> (2024), <u>HB 1451</u> (2024), <u>HB 1589</u> (2024)
Georgia	Brian Kemp	Legislative	<u>HB 130</u> (2024), <u>HB 1105</u> (2024)

<sup>2</sup> Arkansas Governor Sanders, former Arizona Governor Ducey, Florida Governor DeSantis, Georgia Governor Kemp, Idaho Governor Little, Indiana Governor Holcomb, Iowa Governor Reynolds, Louisiana Governor Landry, Mississippi Governor Reeves, Missouri Governor Parson, Montana Governor Gianforte, Nebraska Governor Pillen, former Nebraska Governor Ricketts, New Hampshire Governor Sununu, North Dakota Governor Burgum, Ohio Governor DeWine, Oklahoma Governor Stitt, South Carolina Governor McMaster, South Dakota Governor Noem, Tennessee Governor Lee, Utah Governor Cox, Virginia Governor Youngkin, Wyoming Governor Gordon.



Idaho	Brad Little	Executive	<a href="#"><u>Operation Esto Perpetua to fight fentanyl (2022-present), proclamation for “Idaho Stands with Texas in Securing the Nation’s Border” month (2024)</u></a>
Iowa	Kim Reynolds	Executive	<a href="#"><u>Launched anti-fentanyl media campaign (2022)</u></a>
Iowa	Kim Reynolds	Legislative	<a href="#"><u>SF 2340 (2024)</u></a>
Louisiana	Jeff Landry	Executive	<a href="#"><u>Executive Order JML 24-05 (2024)</u></a>
Louisiana	Jeff Landry	Legislative	<a href="#"><u>HB 19 (2024)</u></a>
Missouri	Mike Parson	Legislative	<a href="#"><u>HB 2016 (2024)</u></a>
Montana	Greg Gianforte	Executive	<a href="#"><u>Executive Order No. 5-2024 (2024); directed Montana National Guard to identify resources to assist Texas (2024)</u></a>
Montana	Greg Gianforte	Legislative	<a href="#"><u>HB 791 (2023)</u></a>
New Hampshire	Chris Sununu	Legislative	<a href="#"><u>\$850,000 in legislature-approved funding (2024)</u></a>
Oklahoma	Kevin Stitt	Legislative	<a href="#"><u>HB 4156 (2024)</u></a>
South Carolina	Henry McMaster	Executive	<a href="#"><u>Executive Order No. 2021-19 (2021); stationed law enforcement at airports to deter illegal aliens (2023)</u></a>
South Dakota	Kristi Noem	Executive	<a href="#"><u>Delivered a special address to a joint session of the legislature on the border (2024); held a press conference on the border for South Dakota media (2024); HCR 6010 (2024)</u></a>
Tennessee	Bill Lee	Legislative	<a href="#"><u>HB 2124 &amp; SB 2576 (2024); HB 2774 &amp; SB 2158 (2024); HB 1872 and SB 2770 (2024)</u></a>
Wyoming	Mark Gordon	Legislative	<a href="#"><u>\$2 million in legislature-approved funding (2024)</u></a>



Many governors have taken executive action to address the impacts of the border crisis on their states. In Louisiana, Governor Jeff Landry signed an executive order just a few months after taking office instructing his state agencies to analyze the effects of illegal immigration on the state. Governor Brad Little of Idaho launched Operation Esto Perpetua, a comprehensive initiative focused on combating the fentanyl threat and mitigating its far-reaching consequences within Idaho. South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster stationed state law enforcement officers at commercial airports to report any attempts to deplane or transport individuals entering the country illegally.

In addition, many governors have signed legislation designed to protect their citizens from the effects of the crisis. Georgia's "Laken Riley Bill," signed by Governor Brian Kemp, empowers local authorities to arrest illegal immigrants and grants judges the power to deport them—a decisive action to prevent a future tragedy like the murder of Laken Riley. Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt also empowered the state's law enforcement officers to arrest those who are not legally present through legislation he signed in 2024. Tennessee Governor Bill Lee signed legislation requiring law enforcement agencies in his state to report any illegal aliens in their custody to the federal government.

Meanwhile, Montana Governor Greg Gianforte signed legislation aimed at combating two critical issues exacerbated by the border crisis: illicit fentanyl smuggling and human trafficking. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has also signed nation-leading legislation to combat human trafficking. Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy requested legislative funding to deploy additional National Guard troops and helicopters to the border, and Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon secured \$2 million from his state legislature to support Texas in any way they can.

Lastly, governors have gone above and beyond to ensure that all Americans know about the disaster at the border and can advocate for change. Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders has written firsthand about her experiences at the border and the reality that every state is experiencing a rise in the trafficking of fentanyl, meth, and other drugs, while also signing legislation to crack down on fentanyl distribution in her state. Governor Kim Reynolds of Iowa launched a media campaign and established a new fentanyl recovery campus within the state, in addition to signing legislation making illegal immigration a state crime. Recognizing the far-reaching impact of this crisis, South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem also delivered a special address to a joint session of the South Dakota legislature highlighting the toll the border crisis is having on her state, and the legislature immediately passed a resolution affirming that the state would continue to support efforts to secure the border.

### Joint Governor Actions

In addition to guardsmen and law enforcement deployments, visits to the border, executive actions, and legislative partnerships that governors have undertaken in their own states, conservative governors have come together many times over the last three and a half years to speak with one voice, consistently draw attention to the crisis, and call on President Biden to take action.



Twenty-six Republican governors have consistently signed joint letters and statements and issued policy plans and recommendations. As far back as May 2021, 20 governors<sup>3</sup> sent a letter to President Biden urging him to take action at the border. Four months later, in September 2021, 26 governors<sup>4</sup> requested a meeting with the president to discuss the ongoing border crisis. Their request for a meeting went unanswered, and in October 2021, the governors followed up with a joint policy framework that made recommendations to secure the border, including completing the border wall, reinstating the remain-in-Mexico policy, and increasing federal resources aimed at human trafficking and drug trafficking.

Despite these requests, the Biden Administration still did not act. In response, in April 2022, 26 governors<sup>5</sup> launched the American Governors' Border Strike Force to coordinate resources and intelligence and assist the state of Texas. The states agreed to formally coordinate their border security efforts by sharing information, co-locating their intelligence analysts in border states, enhancing drug and human trafficking efforts, and much more. Within six months of its inception, the Strike Force conducted a multistate law enforcement operation to disrupt cartel activity that seized 7,000+ pounds of deadly drugs, 300+ firearms, and 10,000+ ammunitions, encountering more than 650 illegal aliens in the process and rescuing eight missing or endangered children.

In May 2023, the Biden Administration exacerbated the problems at the border by lifting Title 42, an emergency health authority implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that had allowed the U.S. to turn back illegal aliens before they entered the country without a deterrence policy in its place. Twenty-four governors<sup>6</sup> issued a statement opposing this plan, but the Biden Administration moved forward with it anyway. To follow up, in September 2023, 25 governors<sup>7</sup> sent another letter to President Biden, again calling on him to address the crisis at the border.

Governor Abbott has continually stepped up his efforts to secure the border, a critical issue for the state of Texas. As the federal government attempted to prevent Texas from taking action to protect itself, 25 governors<sup>8</sup> issued a statement supporting Governor Abbott's constitutional right

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<sup>4</sup> Alabama Governor Ivey, Alaska Governor Dunleavy, former Arizona Governor Ducey, former Arkansas Governor Hutchinson, Florida Governor DeSantis, Georgia Governor Kemp, Idaho Governor Little, Indiana Governor Holcomb, Iowa Governor Reynolds, Maryland Governor Hogan, former Massachusetts Governor Baker, Mississippi Governor Reeves, Missouri Governor Parson, Montana Governor Gianforte, former Nebraska Governor Ricketts, New Hampshire Governor Sununu, North Dakota Governor Burgum, Ohio Governor DeWine, Oklahoma Governor Stitt, South Carolina Governor McMaster, South Dakota Governor Noem, Tennessee Governor Lee, Texas Governor Abbott, Utah Governor Cox, West Virginia Governor Justice, Wyoming Governor Gordon.

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<sup>6</sup> Alabama Governor Ivey, Alaska Governor Dunleavy, Arkansas Governor Sanders, Florida Governor DeSantis, Georgia Governor Kemp, Idaho Governor Little, Indiana Governor Holcomb, Iowa Governor Reynolds, Mississippi Governor Reeves, Missouri Governor Parson, Montana Governor Gianforte, Nebraska Governor Pillen, Nevada Governor Lombardo, New Hampshire Governor Sununu, North Dakota Governor Burgum, Ohio Governor DeWine, Oklahoma Governor Stitt, South Carolina Governor McMaster, South Dakota Governor Noem, Tennessee Governor Lee, Utah Governor Cox, Virginia Governor Youngkin, West Virginia Governor Justice, Wyoming Governor Gordon.

<sup>7</sup> Alabama Governor Ivey, Alaska Governor Dunleavy, Arkansas Governor Sanders, Florida Governor DeSantis, Georgia Governor Kemp, Idaho Governor Little, Indiana Governor Holcomb, Iowa Governor Reynolds, Mississippi Governor Reeves, Missouri Governor Parson, Montana Governor Gianforte, Nebraska Governor Pillen, Nevada Governor Lombardo, New Hampshire Governor Sununu, North Dakota Governor Burgum, Ohio Governor DeWine, Oklahoma Governor Stitt, South Carolina Governor McMaster, South Dakota Governor Noem, Tennessee Governor Lee, Texas Governor Abbott, Utah Governor Cox, Virginia Governor Youngkin, West Virginia Governor Justice, Wyoming Governor Gordon.

<sup>8</sup> Alabama Governor Ivey, Alaska Governor Dunleavy, Arkansas Governor Sanders, Florida Governor DeSantis, Georgia Governor Kemp, Idaho Governor Little, Indiana Governor Holcomb, Iowa Governor Reynolds, Louisiana Governor Landry, Mississippi Governor Reeves, Missouri Governor Parson, Montana Governor Gianforte, Nebraska Governor Pillen, Nevada Governor





to self-defense. Thanks to the actions of these governors, Americans are paying attention—and they know the truth about the crisis at the border.

### Conclusion

The crisis at the southern border has far-reaching consequences that impact every state in the nation. While President Biden has failed to take sufficient action, many conservative governors across the country have stepped up to fill the void. Through personnel deployments, policy initiatives, legal challenges, and coordinated efforts, these governors are doing what they can at the state level to prevent their citizens from enduring the consequences of an open border.

These actions have made a difference. In February 2024, 28 percent of Americans named immigration as the most important problem facing the country today—the highest percentage since Gallup began tracking mentions of immigration. This percentage was also the highest of any single issue, topping government, the economy in general, inflation, and many others. Among Republicans, 57 percent say that immigration is the most important problem. In March 2024, 48 percent of Americans said they personally worry about illegal immigration “a great deal.” As the crisis continues to intensify, Americans are taking notice, and they are increasingly concerned by what they are seeing—and by the Biden Administration’s lack of action to address it.

The leadership of these governors underscores the importance of state-level action when the federal government is unwilling to meet its responsibilities. As this crisis persists, the efforts of conservative governors will remain vital in preserving law and order until national leaders act to secure the border, end human trafficking, and defeat the cartels.

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Lombardo, New Hampshire Governor Sununu, North Dakota Governor Burgum, Ohio Governor DeWine, Oklahoma Governor Stitt, South Carolina Governor McMaster, South Dakota Governor Noem, Tennessee Governor Lee, Utah Governor Cox, Virginia Governor Youngkin, West Virginia Governor Justice, Wyoming Governor Gordon.

