

Texas and Arizona bus thousands of migrants to U.S. capital

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A bus from Del Rio, Texas, carrying migrants from Venezuela, near the US Capitol in Washington, DC

Washington, August 6 (RHC)-- In the basement of a church, a short walk from the U.S. Capitol Building, Daniella rummages through a pile of donated clothing and picks out a pair of yellow pajamas that appear to be her size.

The 23-year-old Venezuelan and her boyfriend have just arrived in Washington, DC, after a free 36-hour bus ride from Texas with several dozen others. Days earlier, the couple had applied for asylum in Texas

after crossing the border with Mexico, claiming dire economic conditions in their home country.

“Like many people here, we didn’t have enough money for a plane or bus ticket to our destination, so we took this free bus ride,” said Daniella, who spoke to Al Jazeera on condition that her last name be withheld. “We heard that here, we would get support and help to get where we need to go, which is New York.”

They are among more than 7,000 migrants who have been bused from Texas and Arizona to the nation’s capital since April, in what critics call a “political stunt” by the Republican governors of the two states to protest President Joe Biden’s border policies.

“By busing migrants to Washington, DC, Texas is sending a clear message: we should not have to bear the burden of the federal government’s inaction to secure the border,” Texas Governor Greg Abbott said in a statement in April.

Indeed, as the country gears up for midterm elections in November, Republicans have seized on the issue of record-breaking migrant arrivals to denounce the Biden administration’s handling of security at the U.S.-Mexico border, slamming his efforts to overturn the anti-immigration legacy of former President Donald Trump.

Nim Kidd, the chief of the Texas Division of Emergency Management, which is responsible for the state’s emergency-response measures, said in late June that the state had spent \$5.3 million to send people to Washington, DC.

Migrants who spoke with Al Jazeera said they were unaware of the political circumstances surrounding the buses that took them thousands of kilometres northeast of where they arrived in the United States.

And while they say they have received a warm welcome in Washington, migrant advocacy groups contend that the very act of putting people on buses to make a political statement is cruel.

“Both Governor Abbott and Governor [Doug Ducey of Arizona] have made clear that this is a political stunt that they are carrying out to send a political message to the Biden administration, regardless of how much it costs the states of Texas and Arizona, or how it impacts the migrants or the people on the ground,” Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, the policy director at the American Immigration Council, told Al Jazeera.

“For migrants themselves, even those who voluntarily get on a bus to DC, being used as a political weapon is inherently degrading.”

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