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USA

Republican Governors Use Migrants as Pawns in Political Game—But Put Themselves in Check

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On September 14, 48 Venezuelan migrants who had come to the United States seeking asylum and had been legally admitted to the country in Texas were lured by an agent of Florida governor Ron DeSantis, to accept an offer to fly to Boston, Massachusetts where they would be given expedited work papers, food and clothing, financial assistance, and other benefits. The planes then flew to Martha's Vineyard, a holiday vacation spot for wealthy people on the East Coast.

DeSantis had not informed the local authorities, no one was there to meet the migrants, and all of the promises that had been made to them were lies. News media showed the disappointed and disoriented migrants, men, women, and children, as the authorities, NGOs, and local people worked to provide them housing, food, and assistance.

DeSantis defended his action, attacking President Joseph Biden for failure to secure the southern border where immigrants, including drug dealers, and criminals, were entering, he said. He said sarcastically that he was happy to provide transportation for migrants to the Democrats sanctuary states. Florida's legislature has approved \$12 million to ship migrants out of the state and DeSantis spent \$615,000 of that money on the flights to Martha's Vineyard.

For several months, three Republican governors—Doug Ducey of Arizona, Greg Abbott of Texas, and Ron DeSantis of Florida—have been transporting immigrants out of their states to gain political support for their party before the mid-term election that will take place on November 8. They have so far bused 10,000 migrants to Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C., all Democratic Party led states and cities. They are doing so, they say, because of the tremendous burden that immigrants have placed on their states and they want to bring the issue to public attention. But they are also taking glee at the difficulties they are causing for Democratic Party governors and mayors of the states and cities to which the migrants are sent while ignoring the hardships caused to the migrants.

The stunt to help the Republican Party in the midterms also raises the governors' own profiles. Abbot and DeSantis are both up for reelection and both could be candidates for the Republican nomination for president in 2024. It could backfire.

Sheriff Javier Salazar, a Democrat in Bexar County, Texas launched a criminal investigation into DeSantis. He called what had happened "an abuse of human rights," and said he believed the migrants were "preyed upon" and "exploited" for "nothing more than political posturing."

At the same time, Lawyers for Civil Rights has filed a class action suit on behalf of the Venezuelan asylum seekers and Alianza America, a network of immigrant organizations, against DeSantis. The suit claims DeSantis "engaged in a fraudulent and discriminatory scheme to transport nearly 50 vulnerable immigrants, including women and children, from San Antonio, Texas to Martha's Vineyard without shelter or resources in place."

"No human being should be used as a political pawn in the nation's highly polarized debate over immigration," said Ivan Espinoza-Madrival of Lawyers for Civil Rights.

Everyone agrees that the U.S. immigration system is broken, with nearly two million undocumented immigrants detained each year. But Republicans suggest that they are criminals or parasites who live off American benefits, while in fact all studies show that immigrants get jobs, contribute economically, and commit fewer crimes than others.

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No doubt the Republican governors will win the support from Trump's political base. But photos of the families with their children standing on American streets looking lost and afraid will also cost them the votes of many independents. Liberals, progressives and socialists, both immigrants and the native-born, mobilized to assist and defend these migrants, and they will go to the polls to vote for Democrats.

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