

**Immigration****Time to address irregular border crossings | Sergio R. Karas**By **Sergio R. Karas**

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(February 7, 2023, 1:28 PM EST) -- On Jan. 19 and 20, 2023, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents arrested 14 Mexican and Vietnamese individuals attempting to enter the U.S. from Canada at the New Brunswick-Maine border. In recent years, Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and CBP have seen an increase in the number of individuals attempting to enter the U.S. through irregular means.

In a recent CBP report, it is noted that the number of encounters with illegal migrants coming from Canada increased by 743 per cent between Oct. 1 and Dec. 31, 2022, which represents the first quarter of their fiscal year, in comparison to the same period in 2021. In December 2022 alone, 441 people were apprehended by CBP, breaking the record for the highest number of encounters with illegal migrants at the northern border.

Even before this recent spike, NBC reports that there has been an increase of illegal migrant encounters at the Canada-U.S. border. In 2018, 963 people were apprehended when attempting to cross into the U.S. from Canada. In 2017, that number was just 504. Most encounters took place in the Swanton Sector, which spans approximately 24,000 square miles and includes the state of Vermont, and parts of New York and New Hampshire.

There is a perception that crossing into the U.S. from Canada is easier than attempting to cross the southern border. It is believed that Mexican drug cartels are exploiting the fact that many migrants come from countries that are visa-exempt to enter Canada, such as Mexico and Romania. Human smugglers will encourage migrants to enter Canada as visitors and then walk across the land border into the U.S., their intended destination.

There is some confusion as to why individuals who have already entered Canada choose to embark on a perilous journey to enter the U.S. illegally and risk apprehension when they could resort to several types of applications to regularize their situation in Canada, such as claiming refugee status or applying for consideration of humanitarian and compassionate grounds when warranted. One theory is that migrants are enticed by the "American dream" and promises of quick riches. Another theory is that they are being encouraged to join their co-nationals, including family and friends from the U.S., and they may find it nearly impossible to obtain U.S. visas, but easier to obtain visas to travel to Canada. Further, they may be able to blend in better in the U.S. and obtain work without authorization without being detected.

Another possible reason for the increased number of encounters with illegal migrants may be rooted in the high cost of living in Canada, especially in large metropolitan areas such as Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Further, with the astronomical increase in illegal migration through the southern border, they may feel that the chance of being apprehended is much smaller at the northern border, as many CBP agents had been reassigned to the U.S.-Mexico border.

Still, the journey between Canada and the U.S. by foot can be a dangerous one. Recently, a family of four from India froze to death in their attempt to cross into the U.S. in the middle of winter 2021. A resident of Florida has been indicted on two counts of human smuggling, and three others have been charged in India in connection with that case. Other recent news stories show photographs of

migrants attempting to enter the U.S. through snow-covered areas and getting stuck.

At the very least, it is clear they are being encouraged to embark upon this treacherous journey by unscrupulous individuals without regard to their safety, and that the migrants are willing to do so even though they are in Canada, not in danger, and could avail themselves of several avenues to try and regularize their status in this country. This situation should be viewed with alarm by both the Canadian and U.S. authorities. Human traffickers are taking advantage of the largest unguarded border in the world, and of Canada's visitor visa exemptions. Some individuals may also be applying for temporary resident visas overseas under false pretences. This situation needs to be addressed immediately before it becomes a much larger problem.

The influx of illegal migrants is not limited to those trying to enter the U.S. Canada has an ongoing problem with individuals who come from the U.S. by land and claim refugee status, even though they have been living in the U.S. for many years. Others obtain visitor visas simply to make their way to the Canadian border and enter at irregular crossings such as Roxham Road in Quebec. They avoid ports of entry as that would trigger the application of the *Safe Third Country Agreement* to return the migrants to the first country that they reached. This has been the subject of much controversy in recent years, with several political parties demanding that the treaty be extended to all ports of entry to close this loophole, and refugee advocacy groups on the other side requesting that the courts dismantle the agreement altogether.

A recent media report claims that migrant arrivals to New York City who have been hosted in Manhattan hotels have become disillusioned and have been given bus tickets to Canada. Given the enormous number of illegal arrivals that the U.S. is grappling with and eclipsing all historical figures, the potential for a massive influx of irregular migrants to Canada is a real possibility. Once a few busloads of migrants appear at the border, claim asylum and receive support payments and free health care, the word may spread like wildfire through the illegal U.S. population and cause a tidal wave of arrivals to Canada.

It is time for policymakers to deal with the situation on both sides of the border before these problems become an unmanageable crisis.

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