

Border arrests surge, erasing much of Trump's early gains

By ELLIOT SPAGAT

Associated Press, December 15, 2017



SAN DIEGO (AP) — The U.S. government on Friday announced a seventh straight monthly increase in people being arrested or denied entry along the Mexican border, erasing much of the early gains of President Donald Trump's push to tighten the border.

Denials of entry for people at official crossings and border arrests reached 39,006 in November, up 12 percent from 34,855 in October and more than double the 15,766 who were stopped or arrested in April. But November's figure was still down 38 percent from 63,361 for November of 2016, shortly before Trump took office.

Border arrests don't capture how many people got away from agents but are widely used to understand trends in how many attempt to enter the country illegally.

Trump touted the dramatic decline in arrests during the early months of his presidency as evidence that his administration was making the border more secure. Reasons for the drop and recent rise are unclear but Trump's pledge to build a wall with Mexico may have initially discouraged people from trying and now be having less impact.

Administration officials said last week that they were concerned about an increase in families and unaccompanied children showing up at the U.S. border with Mexico.

Customs and Border Protection asked for changes to a 2008 law that gave new protections to children entering the country who are not from Canada or Mexico and prevents them from quickly being sent home.

Tyler Houlton, a Homeland Security Department spokesman, said illegal immigration has declined over the last year.

The uptick since April “underscores that Congress must act immediately to close immigration loopholes, fund the border wall, terminate outdated visa programs and provide the necessary tools for DHS officials to carry out their mission,” he said.

November’s count was far below the number of people who were stopped trying to enter the U.S. during the Obama administration’s final months and the summer of 2014, when large numbers of families and children from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras crossed through southern Texas. Still, it was higher than five months in 2014 and in 2015 and four months in 2013.

Border Patrol arrests of people traveling as families totaled 7,018 in November, up 45 percent from 4,839 in October. Arrests of unaccompanied children reached 4,000, up 26 percent from 3,168 a month earlier.

Trump made his pledge for a “big, beautiful wall” with Mexico a centerpiece of his presidential campaign. Last week, the government announced that Border Patrol arrests plunged to a 45-year low in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30.

Congressional Democrats have balked at Trump’s request for \$1.6 billion to build or replace 74 miles (118 kilometers) of wall in San Diego and Texas’ Rio Grande Valley by October.