

Kamala Harris touring ‘border’ spot hundreds of miles from actual crisis



Vice President Kamala Harris visits the El Paso central processing center in Texas on June 25, 2021. REUTERS

Vice President Kamala Harris finally visited the US-Mexico border on Friday — but toured an area far from the epicenter of the migrant crisis in what critics slammed as rush-job to get ahead of a visit next week by former President Donald Trump.

Harris was appointed 94 days ago to lead the Biden administration’s response to a surge in illegal immigration and got defensive when asked about the timing of the quick stopover en route to her home state of California.

“It’s not my first trip. I’ve been to the border many times,” Harris snapped after walking down the steps of Air Force Two for the approximately five-hour stop in

El Paso, Texas.

Harris added, “I said back in March I was going to come to the border, so this is not a new plan” — apparently referring to the moment she laughed and said “not today!” when asked when she would visit.

Kamala Harris speaks with Gloria Chavez, chief patrol agent at the El Paso border processing center. -REUTERS

Harris made her arrival at El Paso International Airport in Texas. YURI GRIPAS/POOL/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

The number of migrant apprehensions spiked this year, following the Biden administration’s rollback on former President Donald Trump’s border policies. Border busts hit a 21-year monthly high in May, unabated by Harris’ mission to address the “root causes.”

Harris drew fire from leaders of the Border Patrol’s labor union for choosing to visit one of the least-chaotic stretches of the border — and was greeted in Texas by pro-Trump protesters.

“You don’t go to El Paso to see what is actually going on at the border,” said Brandon Judd, president of the National Border Patrol Council, in a Fox News interview.

Judd said that the El Paso sector is relatively well-secured and that Harris should have visited McAllen, Texas, to see where the most migrant apprehensions are happening or Tucson, Ariz., to see where the most migrants are successfully evading authorities.

The vice president greeted border agents upon arrival. Shutterstock

Vice President Kamala Harris stands next to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas as she speaks with a member of the U.S. Border Patrol. Reuters

The vice president of the Border Patrol's union, Art Del Cueto, called Harris' choice of El Paso a "slap in the face."

"If she really wanted to see what was going on, she would go to the hot zones," Del Cueto told Fox.

Harris was accompanied to Texas by Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Rep. Veronica Escobar (D-Texas), and Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

Escobar welcomed migrants to El Paso, saying on the tarmac that it was "the new Ellis Island" and "the capital of the border."

Harris said on the tarmac, "We are here today to address and to talk about what has brought people to the US border. And again, to continue to address the root causes which cause people to leave and often flee their home country."

Harris said her trip is happening now because she first wanted to visit Latin America.

"The important aspect of this visit is leading this visit after the work that we did in Guatemala and Mexico... The reality of it is that we have to deal with causes and we have to deal with the effects," she said.

"So being in Guatemala, being in Mexico, talking with Mexico as a partner, frankly, on the issue, was about addressing the causes. And then coming to the border at the advice and actually the invitation of [Escobar], is about looking at the effects of what we have seen happening in Central America."

A graphic shows the distance between the border and the processing center where Kamala Harris visited.

Harris added: "I'm glad to be here. It was always the plan to come here. And I think we're gonna have a good and productive day."

After leaving the tarmac, she departed for the El Paso Border Patrol Station, where she met and spoke with agents on the frontlines involved in catching and processing migrants.

Speaking to a group of agents while outside the facility, which does not shelter individuals, one officer told the VP that El Paso was a "very vibrant city."

All wore masks both in and outside, making it hard to decipher what Harris was saying for much of the tour.

At one point, she congratulated officers in the station for how they had streamlined parts of their processing program, though it was unclear what specifically she was praising.

Those leading the tour then took the delegation to see more of the facility.

After leaving, Harris will head to a meeting with "faith-based" organizations, as well as "shelter and legal service providers."

The trip — Harris' first in the more than three months since President Biden tapped her to handle the record-smashing surge of illegal immigration — comes amid bipartisan criticism of the administration's handling of the crisis.

Asked about her trip while speaking to Newsmax in an interview Friday morning, former President Trump said he supported her making the journey — as long as she actually visited locations impacted by the crisis, as opposed to her planned tour of "a part of the border that is seldom violated."

Vice President Kamala Harris takes part in a roundtable with faith and community leaders who are assisting with the processing of migrants seeking asylum, at Paso del Norte Port of Entry in El Paso, Texas, June 25, 2021. -REUTERS

Harris reacts while taking part in the discussion. REUTERS

“I think she should go to the border,” the 45th commander-in-chief told the network, “I think she should go to the real part of the border, not a part of the border that is seldom violated.”

“Look, the border is causing death at a level that nobody’s ever seen before, you know, you have people dying in the deserts and they have no water,” he continued, “They’re coming in by the thousands, and they’re coming in sick.”

“They’re spreading disease to our country,” he also said, calling it “just unbelievable how bad it is.”

Critics say Biden’s decision to reverse Trump administration border policies prompted a flood of Central American and Mexican migrants, including thousands of unaccompanied children.

Protesters line the route of Harris’s motorcade at the processing facility. REUTERS

Some Central Americans looking for refuge from the Northern Triangle countries — Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras — have taken these policy moves, as well as the overwhelmingly more welcoming tone from Democrats, as a sign that President Biden is inviting them to cross the border.

Insisting that the border was not facing a crisis, Mayorkas said in early March that the problems the agency faced should be blamed on the previous administration.

As the crisis heated up, Biden tapped his vice president to address the diplomatic measures related to its “root causes.” However, despite intense pressure, she had declined to commit to going to surveil the situation for herself.

Immigrants seeking asylum prepare to be taken to a Border Patrol processing

facility after crossing into the US in La Joya, Texas. Getty Images

Once the trip was announced, Republican and Democratic lawmakers were quick to excoriate Harris on both the timing and location choice.

El Paso — which is represented by Escobar, a strong supporter of the Biden administration — has fared significantly better than areas further downstream along the Rio Grande Valley that are represented by Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas).

Cuellar has spoken out against the Biden administration's handling of the crisis and encouraged Harris to visit the region.

Escobar, meanwhile, has not.

Migrants are flooding the border because they believe Biden will welcome them with open arms, data shows. Getty Images

News of Harris' surprise trip came shortly after Trump announced that he would be traveling to the border next week, prompting skepticism of the timing.

Trump released a statement after it was announced saying his planned border trip with Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and the Republican Study Committee was what finally pushed the VP to make the journey down south, to “see the tremendous destruction and death” caused by Biden's policies.

“After months of ignoring the crisis at the Southern Border, it is great that we got Kamala Harris to finally go and see the tremendous destruction and death that they've created — a direct result of Biden ending my very tough but fair Border policies,” the 45th president began.

“Harris and Biden were given the strongest Border in American history. And now, it is by far the worst in American history.”

Immigrants seeking asylum walk to be processed and taken to a Border Patrol

processing facility after crossing the Rio Grande into the US in Roma, Texas.
Getty Images

“If Governor Abbott and I weren’t going there next week, she would have never gone!”

Harris, who visited Guatemala and Mexico earlier this month as part of her first foreign visit in office, was dogged for her entire trip by questions about going to see the US-Mexico border in person.

Her answer to NBC News’ Lester Holt on the matter gained considerable negative attention.

“We’ve been to the border. So this whole thing about the border, we’ve been to the border,” Harris said, to which Holt replied, “You haven’t been to the border.”

“At some point, you know, we are going to the border,” a defensive Harris told Holt on “Today” in Guatemala — 1,308 miles away from the US-Mexico crossing.

Harris, seeming to laugh at her own joke, responded: “And I haven’t been to Europe. And I mean, I don’t understand the point that you’re making. I’m not discounting the importance of the border.”

Speaking to reporters about the trip Thursday, chief Harris spokeswoman Symone Sanders defended the timing and location choice, saying, “this administration does not take their cues from Republican criticism, nor from the former president of the United States of America.”

“The Vice President has said, over the course — over the last three months, that she would go to the border. She has been before. She would go again. She would go when it was appropriate when it made sense.”

As for the choice of El Paso, Sanders took a shot at Republicans by making reference to the Trump administration.

“I will note that El Paso being the birthplace — birthplace of the previous administration’s family separation policy is an important part of the story here and one that you can expect we will continue to tell tomorrow on the ground.”

Source:

<https://nypost.com/2021/06/25/kamala-harris-en-route-to-visit-border-adjacent-facility/>

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