

## Border Battleground – Day Four

### Brazilian immigrants now subject to expedited removal

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MEXICO CITY, August 17, 2005 – An expedited immigrant removal program that has been on the books for nine years but never used in the Rio Grande Valley until June has already produced a 40-percent reduction of illegal immigration from Brazil.

U.S. Border Patrol spokesman Roy Cervantes said the program has been authorized under federal law since 1996, but was first tested in Laredo and San Diego, Calif. before being implemented here this summer.



Under the program, undocumented immigrants from nations other than Mexico or Canada are detained and deported in as little as two weeks.

“As an enforcement tool, expedited removal has already proven to reduce the number of illegal entries,” Cervantes said. “It protects the border and disrupts the cycle of human smugglers.”

Border Patrol figures show that the Valley and South Texas have become major transit points for illegal immigrants from nations other than Mexico.

Arrest figures show that Brazilians and Central Americans now outnumber Mexicans in the numbers of undocumented immigrants.

Since October, Border Patrol agents have arrested 21,456 Brazilians, 18,482 Hondurans, and 15,412 El Salvadorans compared to 45,418 Mexicans.

Part of the problem is blamed on the lack of immigration detention space that prompted Border Patrol agents to give thousands of Brazilians and Central Americans notices to appear (NTAs) before an immigration judge.

The immigrants were released with their NTAs, but more than 90 percent of them failed to appear in court. Cervantes said the expedited removal program would change the process.

“There are no more NTAs,” he said. “We’ve moved away from ‘catch and release.’ ”

Cervantes said expedited removal applies to adult immigrants who are not Canadian or Mexican citizens, show no history of mental illness and were caught within 14 days of entering the United States in an area within 100 miles of the border.

Although Border Patrol figures show a record 21,456 Brazilians have been caught in the Valley and south Texas since October, Cervantes said figures from July show a 40 reduction from the previous month.

Cervantes said the decrease is attributed to word of mouth among immigrants and human smugglers.

But Nathan Selzer with the Valley Movement for Human Rights said the expedited removal program could create the potential for violations of due process or cause agents to overlook asylum seekers.

Selzer said proximity to the border has made Mexicans the only recipients of expedited removal, but the program was slowly expanded to include Central Americans and others at ports of entry and then the field.

Selzer said expedited removal escalates a situation created by Border Patrol enforcement policies that have pushed illegal immigration out of border cities and into rural areas where risks for injury or death are higher.

“It just shows how failed U.S. immigration policy is,” Selzer said. “It will not deter entry. It just gets people out faster and they’ll just come back.”

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