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Two men in suits and masks sit on either side of Joe Biden, also in a suit, at a long table. A ma

U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, pictured with President Joe Biden in a March 1, 2021, file photo. Blinken and Mayorkas made issued a statement April 27, 2023, on steps the Biden administration will take in an effort to reduce migrant arrivals at the U.S.-Mexico border when Title 42 expires May 11. (OSV News photo/Kevin Lamarque, Reuters)

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The Biden administration announced April 27 new steps it would take in an effort to reduce migrant arrivals at the U.S.-Mexico border when Title 42 expires in May.

In remarks at the State Department, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said the administration would set up migrant processing centers in Latin America to screen those seeking entry as to whether they have a legal pathway.

The administration also will expand legal pathways for entry, while increasing deportations of those who enter the United States unlawfully.

Blinken said the centers would "improve qualified individuals' access" to refugee resettlement, family reunification and lawful settlement in the U.S. or other countries.

"These centers will take a hugely important step to prevent people from making the dangerous journey to the border by providing a much safer, legal option to migrate that they can pursue in and from their own countries," Blinken said.

Mayorkas said that "when people have safe and orderly pathways to come to the United States, and face consequences for failing to do so, they use those pathways."

Title 42 is a part of federal U.S. public health law granting the federal government some authority to implement emergency action to prevent the spread of contagious diseases by barring some individuals from entry.

Then-President Donald Trump implemented the policy in 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the move was seen as part of his administration's broader attempts to reduce migration. The use of Title 42 to expel migrants at the southern border was criticized by some public health experts, who argued it was politically motivated rather than evidence-based.

Since then, Title 42 has been invoked more than 2.7 million times to expel migrants, including those seeking asylum, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. Title 42 is set to end May 11.

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"Of course, as always, it depends on how something is implemented and what resources are devoted to the implementation that will decide whether it's successful or not," Appleby said. "But it gives asylum- seekers an opportunity to tell their

stories and have their cases adjudicated without taking a dangerous journey north."

Appleby, a former adviser on migration policy for the U.S. bishops, said that for the last quarter century, "Congress has not had the political courage to reform the immigration system."

"So it's left to the executive branch to come up with these responses, when Congress should be working with the administration to pass legislation to overhaul our immigration laws," he said.

Republicans have made immigration a key part of their criticism of the Biden administration, accusing him of lax policies. In a statement reacting to Joe Biden's 2024 reelection bid, Trump, in the midst of his third bid for the White House after Biden defeated him in 2020, said, "Under Biden, the Southern Border has been abolished -- and millions of illegal aliens have been released into our communities."

A fact sheet from the State Department about the new actions said, "The lifting of the Title 42 order does not mean the border is open."

The fact sheet said that any individuals who unlawfully cross the U.S. southern border after Title 42 is lifted will be processed for expedited removal, barred from reentry for at least five years if they are ordered removed and would be ineligible for asylum "absent an applicable exception."

"To avoid these consequences, individuals are encouraged to use the many lawful pathways the United States has expanded over the past two years," the fact sheet said.

The U.S. bishops and other Catholic immigration advocates have criticized Title 42 as well as the Biden administration's continued use of the Trump-era policy.

OSV News has reached out to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for comment.