

Trump unveils sweeping attack on immigrants in reform proposal

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On Thursday, the Trump administration rolled out the most right-wing immigration reform proposal since the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 established immigration quotas to “stabilize the ethnic composition” of the United States.

The Trump proposal, based largely on the SECURE Act introduced by Senators Tom Cotton and David Perdue, will fundamentally alter the sociodemographic composition of the United States. If enacted as law, the proposal will cut documented immigration by 22 million people over the next 50 years.

According to the White House, the plan includes \$25 billion to expand the wall along the US-Mexico border and to further militarize not only the borderlands but at all “ports of entry/exit,” i.e., all air and sea ports. The plan will result in a massive hiring of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, who will be further armed and emboldened with pseudo-legal powers to conduct mass workplace raids, home invasions and public arrests of immigrants.

The Trump plan proposes to hire “new DHS personnel, ICE attorneys, immigration judges, prosecutors and other law enforcement professionals” to speed up the deportation process. The plan will drastically slash due process protections for immigrants who are lucky enough to see the inside of a courtroom, or, in the government’s newspeak, “implement immigration court reforms to improve efficiency and prevent fraud and abuse.”

As for the country’s 1.8 million undocumented immigrants who are recipients or eligible for protection under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, the Trump administration proposal puts forward a “10-12 year path for citizenship, with requirements for work, education and good moral character.” DACA recipients would also be required to

prove they are not a “public charge,” likely by abstaining from public benefits.

This means nothing for DACA recipients, whose rights could be taken away once again by a right-wing legislature at any point over the next decade.

The most dramatic cut to immigration will come by ending the family-based petition system, which has governed immigration policy for several decades. According to a study published yesterday by the Cato Institute, the new policy eliminates the right of a US citizen or legal permanent resident to petition for the entry of parents, unmarried adult children, married adult children or siblings. Legal permanent residents will also lose their ability to petition for their spouses and minor children. The Trump administration calls these restrictions “protecting the nuclear family by emphasizing close familial relationships.”

The Trump proposal will also slash the number of asylees in half, from 37,200 to 18,600. As a result, thousands of people who face persecution in their home countries and who have legal claims to refugee status will be denied the right to which they are entitled under international law. The Trump administration plan also eliminates the diversity visa, which grants 50,000 visas each year from a pool of 10 to 20 million annual applicants. These visas are a lifeline for impoverished people from dozens of countries that have a relatively small number of people attempting to migrate to the United States.

According to the Cato study, “the State Department records 3.7 million applicants waiting abroad in the categories that the SECURE Act would eliminate,” while roughly 250,000 people in a similar position are already in the US.

On Monday, a group of 48 Democratic and Republican lawmakers announced a similar proposal

with a 10-12 year wait for DACA recipients to acquire citizenship, as well as billions more in funding for border security and wall construction. This proposal is likely to be vetoed by Trump, who is demanding more extreme measures.

The Democratic Party's response to Trump's hardline proposal has been muted. On Sunday, the Democratic leadership reiterated its main priority: pressuring the Trump administration to adopt a more hardline approach toward Russia. Speaking Sunday, Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer said, "The most important thing Congress can do right now is to ensure that Special Counsel Mueller's investigation continues uninterrupted and unimpeded."

Last night, Schumer published an op-ed in the *Washington Post* in anticipation of Trump's State of the Union address Tuesday that included no reference to Trump's immigration proposal. The article, titled "What I'm listening for in Trump's State of the Union," is about infrastructure spending. Schumer, presenting himself as an advisor to the president, says Trump "should urge Congress to deliver a substantial investment in our nation's infrastructure" and that "we Democrats will gladly work with him on it."

Meanwhile, the death toll in the desert continues to grow as thousands of immigrants seek shelter and family unification in the United States. On Friday, 76 immigrants were found in the back of a trailer after crossing the US-Mexico border near Laredo, Texas. The passengers, including 13 children, were more fortunate than the ten immigrants who suffocated in July 2017 after being stuffed in the back of a trailer near San Antonio.

On Monday, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals—the most liberal of all US appellate circuits, with jurisdiction over California and Arizona—ruled unanimously that children do not have the right to free legal representation in deportation hearings. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, a court panel "upheld an immigration judge's decision to deny asylum to a minor identified as C.J.L.G., who left Honduras at age 13 after being threatened by gangs."

"Mandating free court-appointed counsel could further strain an already overextended immigration system," wrote Judge Consuelo Callahan.

The boy and his mother, who were too poor to afford

a lawyer, will now be sent back to one of the most violent countries in the world to face their former persecutors. The decision, which was supported by an Obama appointee, is a death sentence for countless other immigrant children. This development is not an exception for the meat grinder of the American immigration system. As a result of policies enacted by both the Democratic and Republican parties, it is the rule.



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