

Democrats back punitive immigration plan as Senate vote looms

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15 February 2018

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced last night that the Senate will vote today on four immigration amendments after both parties agreed to a framework far to the right of any public discussion on the subject since the 1920s, when the government implemented racial quotas to block millions from entering the US.

After weeks of sham debate in which Democrats postured as opponents of Trump's far-right proposals, the leading bipartisan amendment, put forward by Republican Susan Collins and supported by Democratic leadership, is the same as Donald Trump's initial proposal in January.

This amendment, dubbed the "moderate" option by the corporate press, would give \$25 billion to construct a border wall. This vast sum would militarize the border, trapping thousands more in death by hypothermia or dehydration. It would also transform the immigration and border police into a powerful and visible force in towns and cities across the country, giving them tools to conduct Gestapo-like mass raids and arrests and to jail immigrants at an unprecedented rate.

In exchange, 1.8 million immigrant youth brought to the US as children would be forced to wait 10 to 12 years—until the oldest are nearly 50 years old—before some acquire citizenship. The bill would do nothing to protect the parents of the 1.8 million, leaving them vulnerable to deportation.

Trump has come out in support of another proposal by Iowa Senator Charles Grassley that would eliminate family-based petitions and thereby slash immigration by over 20 million over the next decades. That a proposal to cut *legal* immigration will earn the votes of Republicans and likely some Democrats would have been unheard of just a few years ago.

Vox noted ~~that~~ yesterday ~~Lind~~ an of article "Legal immigration has replaced 'amnesty' as the core of the debate" that in the 1990s and early 2000s, the debate over immigration reform centered on how to grant citizenship to all immigrants in the US without documentation. "That era is over," Lind writes. "In the midst of a messy Senate debate over immigration policy, it's now clear that the most contentious question in Congress is one that's been dormant in legislative fights for years: whether or not to cut legal immigration."

The Democrats have fully participated in this rightward shift. They merely dress up their racist and xenophobic initiatives with references to diversity and the American melting pot.

Democratic Senate Minority Whip Richard Durbin took to the Senate floor yesterday and accepted the notion put forward by Attorney General Jefferson Sessions that asylum applicants are committing fraud. "Is there exploitation in the system?" Durbin asked. "You bet there is. Is there abuse in the system? For sure... Should we be dedicated to cleaning this up? Sign me up, on a bipartisan basis."

Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders came out in support of the proposal to construct a border wall, stating, "We have to protect the dreamers... I'm willing to make some painful concessions." Sanders said he is "scrambling now for three to five more votes" required to pass the Collins deal.

Sanders recently criticized a guest worker program that allows Vermont resorts to hire foreign ski instructors rather than Americans. "Now do you not think we can find young people in Vermont who know how to ski and snowboard?... I think we want to take a hard look at guest worker programs. Some of them remain very unfair."

If a reform bill passes the Senate, it will face opposition from Republicans in the House who will likely add additional anti-immigrant measures. Whatever measure makes it through will then have to be sufficiently anti-immigrant to secure Trump's approval. It is highly unlikely that Congress would be able to override a possible Trump veto with a 2/3 override vote in both houses.

Trump has made clear he will veto a third proposal by Republican John McCain and Democrat Christopher Coons, saying that it does not include sufficient funding for the immigration police, even though it only allows young immigrants to become permanent residents as opposed to citizens.

The secret negotiations between Republicans, Democrats and Trump are taking place in direct opposition to the vast majority of Americans, roughly 90 percent of whom want the young immigrants to become citizens. Polling shows that while the two parties have shifted toward more xenophobic positions, the population has shifted overwhelmingly in favor of immigrants. A recent Gallup report shows that just 35 percent of Americans want to decrease immigration levels, down from 65 percent in 1995.

The Democratic Party has sought to push the immigration debate into the background, focusing attention instead on questions of sexual abuse and bogus allegations of Russian interference in the elections. During congressional hearings for Trump's budget proposal, Democrats failed to raise any opposition to hiring 2,000 new Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and 750 new Border Patrol agents. During Trump's State of the Union address last month, the entire congress, Democrats included, gave a standing ovation to one of Trump's guests, an ICE officer whose job it is to tear immigrants from their families and deport them.

Meanwhile, recent weeks have seen a dangerous intensification of raids and indiscriminate immigration arrests, the purpose of which is to instill terror among the nation's 12 million undocumented people. ICE agents launched a series of raids in Southern California Sunday, arresting over 100 people across the region.

ICE spokeswoman Sarah Rodriguez insinuated that agents targeted immigrants without criminal records in retaliation for efforts by Los Angeles to block local officials from collaborating with immigration agents.

Rodriguez said "uncooperative jurisdictions" forced ICE to "conduct at-large arrests in the community, putting officers, the general public and the aliens at greater risk and increasing the incidence of collateral arrests."

As immigration officials deport children from their schools, workers from their job sites, and split thousands of families across the country, the corporate press has dedicated much more time to whether Donald Trump slept with a pornographic film star or whether he sufficiently denounced an aid accused of domestic abuse. This sordid congressional debate shows that the only way to defend the rights of immigrants is to break with the two anti-immigrant parties and mobilize the entire working class, regardless of immigration status, in defense of democratic rights.



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