

Trump administration plans to limit citizenship for 20 million legal immigrants

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The Trump administration's war on immigrants and the working class as a whole continues unabated with an NBC report Tuesday revealing the administration plans to change existing immigration rules to deny citizenship to legal immigrants who might have accessed any kind of public benefits prior to submitting their application.

The plan to limit citizenship access to legal immigrants is part of fascistic White House senior advisor Stephen Miller's broader anti-immigrant agenda. In its current version, the rule will affect over 20 million legal immigrants who have ever used—either for themselves or any household member—essential public benefits such as health insurance subsidies or food stamps. The rule vastly expands the power of the Department of Homeland Security to deny applications for permanent residency and citizenship.

The rule does not need congressional approval because of the “public charge” clause in US Immigration law that was evoked by the Clinton administration in 1999 to target immigrants who were dependent on cash benefits from programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Now, the Trump administration is expanding the term “public charge” to include immigrants who use non-cash benefits such as Medicaid, the Child Health Insurance Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and many others.

A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security told NBC: “The administration is committed to enforcing existing immigration law, which is clearly intended to protect the American taxpayer by ensuring that foreign nationals seeking to enter or remain in the US are self-sufficient. Any proposed changes would ensure that the government takes the responsibility of being good stewards of taxpayer funds seriously and

adjudicates immigration benefit requests in accordance with the law.”

The move shows the anti-working class character of the attack on immigrants. Last August, Trump endorsed a bill that aimed at drastically slashing legal immigration to the US. Proposed by Senators Tom Cotton (R-AR) and David Perdue (R-GA), the bill proposed to institute a “merit-based system to determine who is admitted to the country and granted legal residency green cards.” This system, if put in place, would slash legal immigration by 41 percent in the first year and eventually by 50 percent.

In expressing support for the legislation, Trump proclaimed, “This legislation will not only restore our competitive edge in the 21st century, but it will restore the sacred bonds of trust between America and its citizens...This legislation demonstrates our compassion for struggling American families who deserve an immigration system that puts their needs first and puts America first.”

The “merit-based” system is an attempt to implement a class quota on immigration. It is meant to favor high-skilled, highly educated and linguistically diverse immigrants and denies access to poor and working class immigrants and those seeking to join family members living in the United States. Under earlier rules, the latter category constituted more than half of the legal immigrants admitted into the country every year.

The attack on immigrants who have relied on social programs is an escalation of this agenda. It is not difficult to imagine that the most vulnerable sections of society have occasionally had to depend on some kind of welfare program for health reasons or to survive. To claim that legal immigrants who have had to use these programs are a “drain” on society and are not “self-

sufficient” is disingenuous and presages an intensified attack on the social programs upon which workers rely regardless of immigration status. In the new rule change, even immigrant households earning as much as 250 percent of poverty-level income could still be rejected.

In addition, the clause that makes an immigrant potentially ineligible for citizenship if someone in their household accesses public benefits means the children of legal immigrants that are US citizens will be effectively barred from accessing social programs.

NBC highlighted the case of Louis Charles, a Haitian green card holder seeking citizenship. Charles, who came to the US in 1989, works nearly 80 hours a week as a nursing assistant. He had initially come into the country with a false passport given by smugglers, which he immediately surrendered to Border Patrol. He received a waiver from USCIS absolving him of wrong doing, and went on to get a green card in 2011.

Charles works nearly 80 hours a week as a nursing assistant. However, Charles has had to rely on disability services over the years to help take care of his daughter, a US citizen now in her 20s who is incapable of living by herself. Under the new rules, Charles will most likely be denied citizenship. Charles, who has already faced some unexpected hurdles in his citizenship application with USCIS informing him that it is revisiting his fake passport charge, now faces the possibility of having to leave his severely disabled daughter to fend for herself.

Workers of all nationalities must recognize the attack on working class immigrants as an attack on the working class as a whole. Only on this basis can both the targeted immigrants and the social services upon which millions rely be protected.



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