

Trump administration takes aim at immigrants who receive federal benefits

Harvey Simpkins
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On Saturday, in another vicious escalation of its war on immigrants, the Trump administration announced plans for federal regulations to prevent immigrants who have ever received certain federal benefits from obtaining green cards or visas, placing class-based limits on immigration to the United States.

Under the proposed rule, which will likely take effect after a pro forma 60-day public review and comment period, disqualifying benefits include Medicare Part D prescription drugs, Medicaid, food stamps and Section 8 housing vouchers.

The new rule will affect people applying for immigration visas or those with temporary residency seeking to remain in the country. It could also prevent the more than 600,000 with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) benefits from obtaining permanent residency.

The draconian regulations are plainly aimed at working class immigrants. It will now force those seeking permanent lawful status to choose whether to forgo benefits that they or family members would otherwise be eligible for, or receive the benefits, give up any chance of a green card or change in visa status—and potentially risk deportation. Even current green card holders could be subject to the new rule and lose their status as lawful permanent residents if, in certain circumstances, they leave the country and try to return.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, almost 20 million children, 90 percent of whom are US citizens, could be affected by the new regulations because their parents or other relatives would be forced to stop receiving benefits in order to maintain the possibility of obtaining permanent residency or an improved visa status.

The proposed policy will cause immigrants to be

“hungrier, sicker and poorer,” Olivia Golden, the executive director of the Center for Law and Social Policy, told *USA Today*. “It targets documented working parents who are playing by the rules. Everything that we know suggests that it’s a terrible idea. We have to fight back.”

Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center, noted the class nature of the proposed rule in a statement to the press, “How you contribute to your community—and not what you look like or the contents of your wallet—should be what matters most. This proposed rule does the opposite and makes clear that the Trump administration continues to prioritize money over family unity by ensuring that only the wealthiest can afford to build a future in this country.”

As with nearly all of the other anti-immigrant policies being enacted by the Trump administration, the newly proposed regulation builds on Democratic policies. Trump’s latest attack is an extension of a federal regulation, implemented by the Clinton administration in 1999, which prevents immigrants who receive federal cash benefits, including welfare and Social Security Disability Insurance, or those institutionalized for long-term care at government expense, from obtaining green cards.

The Department of Homeland Security claims that the rule will affect about 382,000 people each year who will now be subject to a more extensive review of their use of public benefits. DHS also claims that the rule will save \$2.7 billion annually by deterring immigrants from applying for benefits they would otherwise be qualified for. Even assuming these savings are correct, they are a drop in the bucket compared to the money allocated to anti-immigrant agencies, such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs

and Border Protection, not to mention the \$675 billion allocated for the Pentagon in fiscal year 2019 or the massive \$1.5 trillion tax cuts for the wealthy passed in December 2017.

The timing of the latest attack on the most vulnerable section of the working class is also aimed at shoring up support for Republicans in the November 6 congressional midterm elections. Stephen Miller, the fascist chief policy officer for Trump, strongly advocated for the new rule which will be used to whip up support among the most reactionary backers of Trump's far-reaching crackdown on immigrants. The regulations are an especially potent brew for Republicans, as they take aim at both immigrants and those who use public benefits.

Frank Sharry, executive director of America's Voice, a pro-immigration reform group, told *USA Today*, "This has Stephen Miller's fingerprints all over it. He and his cabal of hardliners are determined to keep out and kick out as many immigrants and refugees as possible."

The latest attack on immigrants is just one in a string of Trump policies aimed at the most vulnerable sections of the international working class, including the travel ban effectively barring the vast majority of citizens from Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, North Korea and Venezuela from entering the US; the forced separation of children, including infants and toddlers, from their parents at the US-Mexico border; military-style workplace and home raids that have led to the arrest and deportation of thousands; and a considerable increase in immigration arrests, including the arrest of hundreds of US citizens.

Just last week, the Trump administration announced that it would limit the number of refugees admitted into the United States in fiscal year 2019 to 30,000, which would be the lowest number in more than 38 years. In fiscal year 2018, which ends September 30, the US only admitted about 21,000 refugees.

Also last week, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) notified Congress that it cannot locate almost 1,500 children taken into custody by the government. This comes only months after HHS revealed that it had lost track of 1,475 children in late 2017. In both cases, the children were unaccompanied minors placed by HHS with foster families or agencies.

In response to Trump's latest outrage, the Democrats

will, at most, issue impotent complaints for a day or two, before returning to their twin pillars of "resistance": the anti-Russia and #MeToo witch hunts.



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