

White House to intensify anti-immigrant rampage

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The US government is stepping up its campaign of repression and persecution of immigrants, amid press reports Wednesday that the Trump administration was pushing for a series of harsh new measures, including some form of forcible separation of asylum seekers and their children, extending the length of time that children can be detained, and denying green cards to legal immigrants who have received public assistance (defined so loosely that it includes subsidized meals for school children).

Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* reported that the new policy under consideration on family separation was called “binary choice,” and was premised on jailing every adult who files a claim for refugee status for the entire period that their claim is being evaluated, a process that takes months, if not years.

Those asylum seekers who are parents would be required to decide, when they make an application for refugee status, either to have their children jailed with them, or to have the children taken away for the duration of the claim evaluation period.

ICE and the Border Patrol are currently unable to actually implement “binary choice,” since they lack the detention facilities required to jail all asylum seekers and all their children. But the policy decision would nonetheless have a deterrent effect, in the eyes of administration officials, spreading terror among Central Americans considering flight to the United States.

The crackdown on asylum seekers has already resulted in a significant increase in the rate of denial of asylum claims, from 21 percent in 2016, the last year of the Obama administration, to 47 percent in January 2019. A major factor is the decision of the Department of Justice last year to deny asylum claims based on fear of domestic violence or gang violence.

Trump spewed lies about this subject in comments to the press Tuesday and Wednesday, claiming, “We’re not looking to do that now,” referring to family separation, then adding, “But it brings a lot more people to the border when you don’t do it.”

One administration official, speaking to the *Post*, claimed that it was legal to separate asylum seekers from their children because it was legal to separate US citizens arrested for crimes from their children. “That’s why we know it’s legal,” the official said. “If you cannot separate children from their parents for purposes of imposing criminal sanctions on an adult, then you wouldn’t be able to prosecute anybody who has children, and we’d have to redo the entire criminal justice system.”

This line of reasoning leaves out one essential fact: asylum seekers are not criminals, and under both US and international law, their actions in crossing the US border and then surrendering to US border agents are entirely legal. The policy of the Trump administration seeks, on the contrary, to criminalize the act of seeking asylum, to presume that those fleeing persecution and violence, particularly in Central America, are part of what Trump inevitably declared to be a “con game.” The con-man president should look in the mirror.

Two more top officials of the Department of Homeland Security have stepped down, as a purge of the agency accelerates in the wake of the firing of Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen Sunday. On Tuesday, the acting deputy secretary, Claire Grady, submitted her resignation, allowing Trump to name Kevin McAleenan, director of Customs and Border Protection, as Nielsen’s temporary replacement.

On Wednesday, Ronald Vitiello, acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, submitted his resignation. Trump reversed himself last week,

withdrawing Vitiello's nomination to hold the ICE leadership position permanently, which required Senate confirmation. Trump said at the time that he wanted to go "in a tougher direction."

Press reports said that the purge of DHS was triggered when Customs and Border Protection advised the White House that more than 100,000 migrants had been taken into custody along the US-Mexico border in March, the highest one-month total in more than a decade, including 9,000 unaccompanied children, and 58,000 people travelling in family groups.

Trump was also dissatisfied with the performance of the DHS unit that handles refugee claims for asylum. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services confirmed a "credible fear of persecution," the threshold for considering an asylum claim, in 74,677 of the 97,728 interviews that were completed in the fiscal year that ended September 30, 2018. That proportion, about 75 percent, completely refutes Trump's howling that most refugee claims are bogus.

Trump underscored the political motivation behind the anti-immigrant campaign Wednesday, travelling to San Antonio, Texas for a fund-raiser with wealthy Republicans. He said that he and other Republican candidates would use the border crackdown against their Democratic opponents in the election. "I think they are going to pay a very big price in 2020," Trump said. "I think the border is going to be an incredible issue." He added, in a grotesque lie, "They want to have open borders."

Actually, the Democratic Party has largely supported the barbaric anti-immigrant campaign, only raising objections when there was widespread public revulsion last summer over the forced separation of asylum seekers and their children, and when two children from Central America died in December while in the custody of Customs and Border Protection agents.

Senator Bernie Sanders, who leads in fundraising and poll numbers among the announced Democratic presidential candidates, recently went out of his way to repudiate "open borders" and embrace the claims of Trump's fascist adviser Stephen Miller that increased immigration was a threat to the wages of American workers. (See Bernie Sanders joins Trump's attack on "open borders")

Meanwhile, three Republican senators introduced legislation Wednesday to cut in half the number of

legal immigrants permitted to enter the United States. Tom Cotton of Arkansas, David Perdue of Georgia, and Josh Hawley of Missouri introduced the Reforming American Immigration for Strong Employment Act, a version of legislation that Cotton and Perdue first proposed in 2017, but which never received a vote. The RAISE Act would reduce legal immigration from the present level of about one million a year to about 500,000, in part by eliminating the diversity visa lottery and cutting the number of refugees offered permanent residency. The biggest change would be a sharp reduction in the number of family members who could be sponsored by American citizens and legal residents.



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