

Valdosta Daily Times

Alabama congressman wants local leaders to control immigrant resettlement

By Asia Ashley

Mar 5, 2022

ATLANTA — Alabama U.S. Rep. Mo Brooks is pushing for Congress to hear his proposed bill that would give local control of immigrant resettlement in states and cities.

The bill, however, has not received any traction from Democrats, he said, as they likely won't hear the bill amid Democrat President Joe Biden's efforts to reverse Trump-era restrictions on immigration to the United States.

The proposal was referred to the House judiciary committee following the bill's introduction Jan. 12.

Brooks's "Local Control Act" would prohibit the use of federal funds from transporting, housing and resettling unlawful aliens without approval from governors and local leaders, and prohibit the placement of immigrants in areas where there's a law or policy against resettlement. The bill wouldn't apply to transportation or detention of illegal immigrants for criminal law enforcement purposes.

"In the first year of the Biden Administration, more than 2 million illegal aliens came to the United States," Brooks said. "We've never had a problem of that magnitude in the history of the United States of America. We should be deporting these people as quick as we can, but instead, we're doing what's called 'catch and release' where they're releasing them inside the U.S."

When speaking about the proposal, Brooks frequently uses the phrase "illegal aliens," which he described as foreigners who are not permitted or vetted to live in the country. But the U.S. State Department's website asserts that immigrants or refugees resettled by the federal government aren't illegal because they've passed screenings and background checks.

"The refugees that we work with have already gone through the very, very stringent vetting both by the international authorities (U.N. Refugee Agency)," said John Moeller, CEO and president of Inspiritus, which assists refugees in Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee. "So they've gone thorough vetting and then they've also gone through the U.S. State Department's vetting process. So by the time they get to us, they've already been through what we might refer to as extreme vetting."

According to the U.S. State Department, once immigrants or refugees pass screenings, they are sponsored by a nonprofit resettlement agency, which meet frequently to review biographic information and other records from overseas resettlement centers.

Each resettlement agency monitors the resources of their community such as availability of affordable and safe housing, school capacity, medical care and employment opportunities, according to the State Department website.

But Brooks said the "Local Control Act" is necessary for local leaders to choose what they want in their community as he said some immigrants could commit crimes, bring illegal narcotics and take away jobs from Americans in their communities.

"There are many millions of jobs illegal aliens have taken from American citizens by undercutting the wage markets, so that employers prefer to hire illegal aliens over American citizens," Brooks said.

Pew Research reported that as of 2017, more than 21 million lawful immigrants and 7.6 million unauthorized immigrants were part of the labor force.

"When you increase the supply of something, everything else being constant, the price goes down," he said. "And according to various economic studies, our blue collar workers are the ones who are earning the least and need the most help. We've seen their wages suppressed on average about \$2,500 per person per year."

Moeller, however, argues that immigrants joining the work force are a benefit to America's economy.

"With the workforce crisis that we're facing, not just today but in future years, they're providing a much needed relief to the workforce crisis that we're facing. They play a pretty important role in the American economy," Moeller said, adding that housing shortages in certain areas have presented challenges.

Brooks said the Biden Administration seems to be encouraging immigration through its policies, and claims the federal government has been too overwhelmed to obtain proper data and properly screen them.

The cap for immigrants for Fiscal Year 2022 is 125,000, and for FY 2021, the Biden Administration quadrupled the number set by former President Donald Trump of 15,000 up to 62,500.

“You can't have a hard and fast rule on how many foreign laborers that you can allow in any particular point in time,” Brooks said. “You have to be flexible, depending on the economic circumstances and how in those economic circumstances it affects the lives of regular American citizens.”

On crime, studies have shown that immigrants, both documented and undocumented, are more than half as likely to be arrested for a violent crime than U.S.-born citizens.

In Texas where the Department of Public Safety tracks immigrant arrests and crimes, the illegal immigrant criminal conviction rate was 782 per 100,000 illegal immigrants; 535 per 100,000 legal immigrants; and 1,422 per 100,000 native-born Americans, according to the CATO Institute, a public policy research institute.

“There are always issues attached to growing pains but the upside is much greater than any downside,” Moeller said. “I think that it's a net positive for the communities. Georgia is a melting pot, as is the South. We're economically strong because we've welcomed people from all over to help our economy and help Georgia be the place that it is today.”

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp—whose office did not return requests for comment on the proposal—has previously been welcoming to resettling vetted immigrants in Georgia, but has openly spoken against illegal immigrants living in Georgia.

In February, Brooks co-sponsored the proposed H.R. 6299, a bill that blocks federal funding to state and local governments that allow non-citizen voting.

Some of the jurisdictions that allow legal immigrants to “dilute the voting power,” he said, include New York City, San Francisco, Chicago, nearly a dozen jurisdictions in Maryland and two in Vermont.

“When these people are given amnesty and citizenship, they are overwhelmingly more likely to be on welfare than any other group of people in the United States. That's made for a Democrat voter,” Brooks said.

Immigrants make up about 14% of the U.S. population. States with the highest immigrant population, as of 2019, according to Census data, are:

California: 10.5 million

Texas: 4.8 million

New York: 4.4 million

Florida: 4.32 million

New Jersey: 1.99 million

Illinois: 1.79 million

Massachusetts: 1.14 million

Georgia: 1.05 million

Virginia: 1.05 million

Washington: 1.05 million

Other states:

Alabama: 172,900

Tennessee: 344,000

Mississippi: 70,500