



House Democrats introduce ‘rolling registry’ bill for undocumented immigrants

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A group of House Democrats on Wednesday introduced a bill that would allow undocumented immigrants to apply for immigration papers after seven years in the country.

Currently, it is virtually impossible for undocumented immigrants to legalize their status in the United States.

The bill, introduced by California Democratic Reps. [Zoe Lofgren](#), Lou Correa and [Norma Torres](#), New York Democratic Reps. [Adriano Espaillat](#) and Grace Meng and Rep. Jesús García (D-Ill.), would change a line in the Immigration and Nationality Act known as the “registry.”

“Updating this historically bipartisan provision to provide lawful permanent resident status to immigrants who have been a part of our communities for years will make our immigration system fairer and our country stronger,” said Lofgren, the chairwoman of the House Judiciary subcommittee on immigration.

The main sponsors were joined by a total of 46 Democrats supporting the bill.

The minute change in immigration law — the bill’s text fills less than two pages — would update a line of statute that’s been frozen since 1986.

The Immigration and Nationality Act was written to include a registry date — a sort of statute of limitations for illegal entry, allowing Congress to set arbitrary dates that determined which undocumented immigrants would be allowed to adjust their status.

“Currently millions of immigrants face an uncertain future regarding their residency status,” Espaillat said.

“As one of a handful of immigrants in the House chamber and the only formerly once undocumented to stand with my colleagues, I am proud to extend the opportunity to others to call

America home and continue their efforts to contribute to our nation's economic and social well-being," he added.

Congress first statutorily legalized the status of immigrants who arrived by 1921, then 1924, then 1928, then 1940 and finally 1972.

Historically, immigration reform advocates have called for Congress to periodically update the registry, with the view that immigrants who have rooted themselves in the country while keeping a clean record are a net positive socially and economically.

Some groups, like the libertarian Cato Institute, have long called for a rolling registry like the one proposed in the Democratic bill, taking the burden off Congress to update the registry and using the same logic as the statute of limitations in criminal law.

The adjustment of the registry date to 1972 came in 1986 as part of former President Reagan's immigration amnesty that gave a path to citizenship to around 3 million undocumented immigrants.

Since then, the registry has remained frozen as anti-immigration advocates have given the word "amnesty" a negative connotation and blamed many of the country's ills on the presence of foreign nationals.

But the idea of updating the registry was renewed in talks to pass President Biden's failed Build Back Better bill, when García, Correa and Espaillat threatened to withhold their votes unless immigration reform was included in the bill.

"From the beginning, I have fought for the inclusion of immigration reform in the process of budget reconciliation. The United States immigration system has been flawed for more than 35 years; it's time. Immigrants in our country cannot keep waiting," Correa said in a statement.

While the three congressmen were unable to get leadership to agree to an updated registry in that bill, a version of immigration reform was included in the House-passed legislation that died in the Senate.

If the rolling registry bill passes the House, it faces steep odds in the Senate, up against a packed legislative schedule and a 60-vote threshold due to the filibuster.

Still, the bill would join other immigration provisions with historical bipartisan support, like the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, a bipartisan, House-passed bill that's receiving serious consideration in the upper chamber.

"Eight months ago, the House of Representatives passed the Build Back Better Act, which included urgently needed relief for undocumented immigrants — although not nearly enough as this bill would accomplish — and yet a small group of senators refused to bring even that to the floor for a vote," García said.

“It’s time to stop playing political games and fix our broken immigration system. This bill is a step in the right direction,” he added.