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Cheney backs two bills meant to crack down on illegal immigration, sanctuary cities

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Wyoming's lone U.S. House Rep. Liz Cheney threw her support behind two new pieces of legislation stemming from the rancorous debate over immigration.

One bill would lengthen maximum prison sentences for immigrants who enter the country illegally after having been deported at least once. The other would restrict funding to so-called "sanctuary cities" that refuse to cooperate with efforts to deport immigrants arrested for violent crimes.

Both are named for American citizens killed by immigrants who were in the country illegally.

The first is named for Kate Steinle, who was killed in San Francisco in 2015. As a candidate, President Donald Trump seized on Steinle's murder to show why his tough line on immigration was needed.

The second bill includes a piece of provision called "Sarah and Grant's Law," after Sarah Root and Grant Ronnebeck, who were killed in separate incidents in 2016 and 2015, respectively.

But the bill itself is known as the No Sanctuary for Criminals Act, a reference to sanctuary cities, an undefined term adopted by governments around the country whose elected officials pledge to shield people arrested by local law enforcement from federal immigration authorities.

"No family should ever have to face the tragedy Kate Steinle's family has," Cheney said in a statement last week.

Cheney spokesman Joe Jackson declined to say how the provisions in Kate's Law would help prevent crimes like the one that resulted in Steinle's death.

The bills both passed the House last Thursday. Similar measures have previously been defeated by Democratic filibusters in the Senate.

The anti-sanctuary city bill would restrict cities from receiving some Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security grants if they intentionally sought to avoid enforcing federal immigration laws.

No municipalities in Wyoming appear to have declared themselves sanctuary cities, though in 2010 Jackson somehow found itself on a list of such locales, much to the chagrin of city staff who were forced to field angry calls and emails.

The libertarian Cato Institute criticized the legislation as federal overreach that would limit state sovereignty by mandating how local law enforcement agencies operated.

“This violates a basic principle of federalism, which many conservatives have long championed, that the federal government should leave states to experiment with their own polities,” Cato immigration policy analyst David Bier wrote in a blog post.

Bier warned that similar federal laws could be used to force gun control on unwilling state governments in the future.

But in her statement, Cheney, a Republican, emphasized the importance of ensuring that existing federal immigration policies are enforced across the country.

“We are a nation of laws and we must ensure we enforce those laws,” Cheney said in a statement last week.