

## **Guest Commentary: Trump's Scorched-Earth Campaign Against Immigrants**

Steve and Cokie Roberts

May 21, 2019

President Trump and his allies often say they only oppose undocumented immigrants, not legal ones. During a 2016 campaign stop in Illinois, Trump even applauded a supporter wearing a T-shirt that read, "Legal Immigrant For Trump."

The candidate patted the man on the back and said, "We want people to come in. But they've got to come in, like you, legally, my man."

That's not true. Since taking office, Trump has waged a ruthless scorched-earth campaign against many forms of legal immigration. After a lengthy study of administration policies, the Daily Beast concluded: "The Trump administration has quietly and unofficially made it significantly harder for people to legally immigrate to the United States, according to numerous immigration lawyers."

Recent evidence points to a severe crackdown on the ability of migrants who are fleeing danger and persecution at home to seek asylum in this country — a totally legal process recognized and protected by international conventions.

"That's further confirmation that the administration's official policy toward legal immigration is 'restriction by any means necessary,'" David Bier, an immigration analyst at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, told USA Today. "They're looking across all programs for ways that they can reduce the number of new legal permanent residents, and other foreign workers in the U.S. economy."

Trump showed his true colors by endorsing a draconian measure drafted by two Republican senators that would slash legal immigration in half over the next decade. Since that bill has no chance of passing, the president has used executive action to pursue the same goal.

For example, Trump proposed new regulations that would charge asylum seekers a fee and make it harder for many to obtain work permits while they wait for their cases to be adjudicated. He's tightened the definition of what sort of mistreatment entitles an asylum-seeker to protection. And just this week, reports the Washington Post, the president ordered asylum officers to "take a more skeptical and confrontational approach during interviews with migrants seeking refuge."

"The standards are demanding. Courts require proof," David Leopold, a prominent immigration lawyer, told the Post. "And frankly, when people flee persecution, they don't show up with a note from their torturer."

The new attorney general, William Barr, has eagerly joined Trump's cruel crusade, mandating that asylum seekers who are apprehended crossing the border illegally can be detained indefinitely without bail.

"We are talking about people who are fleeing for their lives, seeking safety," Judy Rabinovitz, an immigration lawyer at the American Civil Liberties Union, said in the New York Times. "And our response is just 'lock them up.'"

Migrants seeking safety who manage to reach the United States can ask for asylum. Applicants outside the country are categorized as refugees, and Trump seems equally determined to slash that program as well.

The administration says it will admit no more than 30,000 refugees in the current fiscal year, but it has erected so many obstacles that only 12,099 navigated the system during the first six months. At that pace, the U.S. will process about 25,000 refugees this year, compared to an average of almost 80,000 that had long prevailed under both Democratic and Republican administrations.

This hard-hearted and immoral crackdown comes while the U.N. estimates that more than 68 million people are displaced around the world, with more than 25 million of them being refugees.

"At a time when the administration could be leading the world in our humanitarian response, which has traditionally been a bipartisan effort, they are slow-walking the program," Jenny Yang of World Relief, a Christian humanitarian organization, told ABC.

Crushing refugees and asylum seekers is only part of Trump's war on legal immigrants. He's tried to cancel a program under which more than 310,000 immigrants from 10 countries have been allowed to live here after natural disasters and civil wars decimated their home countries.

He's tried to end an Obama-era program that allows "Dreamers," undocumented young people who arrived as children, to remain in this country. He's repeatedly attacked laws that allow babies born here to become citizens, and that allow citizens to bring their foreign relatives here to join them.

So the record is clear: Trump lied to that man in the T-shirt. He does not "want people to come in." He wants to keep them out. He would sap the economy of vitally needed young workers and dishonor our reputation as a tolerant, generous nation.

His war on immigrants might win votes next year, but it's a clear loser for America.