KENOSHA NEWS

Steil: Build wall first, then fix 'broken legal immigration system'

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Stop illegal immigration before fixing legal immigration. That's the stance of U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil, R-Wis.

"We have a broken legal immigration system and we have a broken illegal immigration system," Steil, whose district includes all of Racine and Kenosha counties, said during a roundtable on fentanyl in Racine County on Feb. 11.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection reports that it recovers **about 2,500 pounds of drugs every day**, but still drugs pour into the U.S. by sea, sky and ground, most of it across the southern border. Seizures of fentanyl and fentanyl-laced products are on the rise, said LaFonda Sutton-Burke, director of field operations for CBP's Chicago office.

However, the majority of the drugs are believed to be coming through legal ports of entry, not across unguarded areas of the border. "According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection statistics, 90 percent of heroin seized along the border, 88 percent of cocaine, 87 percent of methamphetamine, and 80 percent of fentanyl in the first 11 months of the 2018 fiscal year was caught trying to be smuggled in at legal crossing points," **USA Today reported** in January 2019.

A reporter asked Steil if fixing the legal immigration system — where people from Mexico on average have to wait between 8 and **20 years** before being allowed to legally enter the U.S. while those from most other counties have to wait **less than 5 years to get a green card** — should come first as a way to weaken cartels.

Steil replied: "It is absolutely imperative that we address our illegal immigration system. I've been to the U.S.-Mexico border. I've seen how porous it is. I've seen individuals come across … I think that is absolutely step one."

It's estimated that 80% to 95% of undocumented immigrants pay traffickers to get them into the U.S.

The **Cato Institute**, a libertarian think tank funded by billionaire Charles Koch, has advocated for breaking down this system by allowing those same migrants to enter the U.S. for a fee.

Currently, the U.S. "(immigration) system enriches criminals, hurts immigrants, and undermines U.S. security. There's a better way: the U.S. government should charge a fee for a work permit. Peaceful immigrants who pass a background check could skip the extortion racket and fly legally to U.S. airports, passing through security screening like everyone else," stated a 2019 **commentary by Cato Research Fellow David J. Bier**.

"Not only would this system effectively eliminate the border chaos, it would provide billions of dollars in revenue to the U.S. government to further upgrade border security if Congress still felt that was necessary. President (Donald) Trump has demanded money for a border wall from Congress, but immigrants themselves could easily give him far more than Congress ever will."

The effectiveness of the wall has been disputed.

Steil has supported it, saying that despite its vulnerabilities, a wall across the 1,954-mile southern border would send a **"message"** that the border is not open.

The Department of Homeland Security **reported in the final months of Trump's presidency** that the costs of defending walled parts of the border significantly dropped while illegal entries also fell in those areas.

However, **other studies** have indicated that the wall is still **porous** and **climbable**, and that while crossings may be down in areas that are walled, migrants are just crossing at unwalled parts instead.