



Ron DeSantis' claim that Trump wanted to grant 'amnesty' to 2 million people needs context

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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is trying to differentiate himself from his former ally, and now political opponent, Donald Trump. Since announcing his presidential bid, DeSantis has positioned himself as the more right-leaning 2024 candidate, saying Trump is attacking him "from the left."

"He's attacking me for opposing an amnesty bill. He wanted to amnesty 2 million illegal aliens in 2018 when he was president," DeSantis said in a May 25 radio interview on "The Matt Murphy Show." "I opposed him on that. Because I'm opposed to amnesty."

We've fact-checked several claims about political candidates' stance on "amnesty," and we've found that people apply different definitions to the term. For some, amnesty is giving people who are in the U.S. illegally a legal status. For others, it's a catch-all term for any policy favorable to people in the U.S. illegally, even if it doesn't lead to citizenship.

A common reference for amnesty is the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, signed by President Ronald Reagan, which paved the way for immigrants who were in the country illegally to become lawful permanent residents if they met certain requirements.

Did Trump support "amnesty" for 2 million people?

DeSantis' team pointed PolitiFact to a series of articles about Trump's position on giving immigrants who came to the U.S. illegally as children a path to citizenship.

In 2018, Trump's administration proposed a plan that would provide a path to citizenship for 1.8 million people brought to the U.S. illegally as children in exchange for legal immigration restrictions and \$25 million in border security funding.

Later that year, Trump went back and forth on his support for an immigration bill that would have provided a citizenship path to some of those immigrants. Experts at the time placed the number of beneficiaries lower than what DeSantis said, between 420,000 and 1.2 million people.

Trump was open to citizenship path for DACA beneficiaries

For decades, there has been bipartisan support to give children brought to the U.S. illegally as children a chance to stay in the U.S. permanently and legally, but a compromise hasn't been reached.

In September 2017, the Trump administration said it would end an Obama-era program that prevents the deportation of eligible immigrants who entered the U.S. illegally as children. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals would phase out by March 5, 2018, eliminating beneficiaries' protections against deportation and revoking their work permits.

As that deadline loomed, Republican and Democratic lawmakers scrambled to propose bills that would allow DACA recipients to stay in the United States.

In conversations with lawmakers and reporters in 2018, Trump said he was open to negotiating a deal that would provide a path to citizenship for DACA beneficiaries as long as it was coupled with border security funding.

The Trump White House proposed a path to citizenship for people brought to the U.S. illegally as children in exchange for legal immigration restrictions and \$25 million in border- security funding, according to The Associated Press. By its own math, the White House said it would affect 1.8 million people.

Trump "wants to provide legal status for DACA recipients and certain other DACA-eligible illegal immigrants," said a January 2018 White House fact-sheet outlining the proposal, "to encompass a total population of approximately 1.8 million individuals."

The path to citizenship would take between 10 to 12 years and include work and education requirements.

The Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank, said it was unclear how the administration reached that 1.8 million figure. Based on its own estimates, the group said there were around 1.8 million people who could be eligible for initial protections under the proposal. However, the number who could eventually become citizens would depend on requirements that the White House did not specify.

Trump's campaign did not respond to our request for

comment.

Two bills benefited fewer than 2 million people, DeSantis supported one of them

Beyond his proposal, Trump called on Congress to devise solutions. Two immigration bills introduced by one lawmaker, Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., were in play.

In a May 25 interview with Newsmax, DeSantis pointed to the "Goodlatte II bill in 2018" as evidence that Trump supported giving amnesty to 2 million immigrants.

In 2018, Goodlatte introduced the "Securing America's Future Act of 2018," known as Goodlatte I, and the "Border Security and Immigration Reform Act of 2018," known as Goodlatte II.

Both bills increased border security through technology and barriers and reduced legal immigration. The bills also tried to help people who came to the U.S. illegally as children.

Under Goodlatte I, DACA recipients would be eligible to apply for a three-year, renewable nonimmigrant legal status. However, that status would not give them a path to citizenship.

DeSantis voted for Goodlatte I. This bill would qualify as amnesty under the most conservative definition because it provided a form of relief to a group of people that entered the U.S. illegally.

DeSantis voted against Goodlatte II, a compromise among conservative and moderate Republicans. Under this bill, a broader group of immigrants who came to the U.S. illegally as children would be able to apply for the same nonimmigrant legal status. However, this status would last for six years and eventually they could apply for citizenship.

Neither bill passed the House.

Exactly how many people those bills would have affected is unclear, but we did not find estimates that put it as high as 2 million.

The Migration Policy Institute calculated that, at most, the Goodlatte II bill would give temporary legal status to about 1.25 million people — the majority of whom would eventually become eligible for citizenship. Close to 600,000 people would have been eligible under the more conservative bill, Goodlatte I.

The libertarian Cato Institute had a much lower estimate. It said the Goodlatte II bill would likely give temporary status to about 822,000 people and result in citizenship for about 420,000. The Cato Institute did not provide estimates for the stricter legislation.

Trump sent mixed messages about his support for the bills.

In a June 15, 2018, interview with Fox News, Trump said he had considered both bills and that he "certainly wouldn't" sign the one that would provide a path to citizenship. Later that day, the White House backtracked on Trump's comments, saying he would sign either bill into law.

On June 27, 2018, the day the House voted on the bill that provided a path to citizenship, Trump tweeted his support for it: "HOUSE REPUBLICANS SHOULD PASS THE STRONG BUT FAIR IMMIGRATION BILL, KNOWN AS GOODLATTE II."

Three days after that bill failed, Trump cooled his support for the bills.

"I never pushed the Republicans in the House to vote for the Immigration Bill, either GOODLATTE 1 or 2, because it could never have gotten enough Democrats as long as there is the 60 vote threshold," Trump tweeted June 30, 2018.

Our ruling

DeSantis said Trump "wanted to amnesty 2 million illegal aliens in 2018 when he was president."

In January 2018, Trump proposed a plan that would provide a path to citizenship for 1.8 million people brought to the U.S. illegally as children in exchange for legal immigration restrictions and \$25 million in border security funding. This came after his administration tried to end DACA and as lawmakers proposed ways to keep the program's beneficiaries in the U.S.

As related bills moved through Congress, Trump went back and forth on his support for a bill that would provide a path to citizenship for DACA beneficiaries. At the time, think tanks estimated that 420,000 to 1.25 million people would have been eligible for citizenship under that proposal.

DeSantis' statement is accurate but needs clarification or additional information. We rate it Mostly True.