



## **Alternative Fact of the Week: Democrats want to bring criminals into the country**

December 7, 2017

House Republicans are poised today to pass a stopgap spending bill that would help avert the possibility of a government shutdown this weekend. So breathe easy, all you Marylanders whose livelihoods are in some way tied to the federal government — which is to say, pretty much all of us to one degree or another. If everything goes well, we won't be in this position again for two whole weeks. Merry Christmas.

Unfortunately, though, President Donald Trump is doing his darndest to amp up the drama, and with it the calamitous possibility that the government won't be able to pay its bills as of Dec. 22. On Wednesday, he offered up this whopper about the chance for a shutdown: "It could happen" because Democrats "want to have illegal immigrants pouring into our country, bringing with them crime, tremendous amounts of crime. We don't want to have that. We want to have a great, beautiful, crime-free country."

Where to begin?

First, immigrants in general are actually less likely to commit crimes than native born Americans, as numerous studies have documented. This year, the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute sought to answer the question about whether illegal immigrants, specifically, are more likely to commit crimes and found that they are — compared to legal immigrants but not compared to native born citizens. The incarceration rate for natives is 1.53 percent, Cato found, compared to .85 percent for illegal immigrants and .47 for legal ones. Factoring out the substantial number of illegal immigrants who are incarcerated for immigration violations rather than the sorts of crimes President Trump alluded to, the incarceration rate for illegal immigrants drops to about .5 percent, or roughly one-third of that of the native population.

Second, there's the issue of what the Democrats are actually fighting for. They are not arguing for open borders or an end to immigration enforcement. In fact, the party's leaders have been willing to discuss funding for stepped-up immigration enforcement. What they're trying to accomplish amid the budget negotiations is a deal on permanent status for the so-called Dreamers. That's the approximately 800,000 young people who were brought to this country illegally as children and who applied for protected status under and Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. DACA did not create a path

to citizenship, but it did temporarily shield participants from deportation and provided a mechanism for them to work in this country legally.

Protecting them, by definition, does not in any way constitute countenancing “illegal immigrants pouring into our country, bringing with them crime.” For one, in order to be eligible for DACA, applicants “must not have been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, three or more other misdemeanors, and must not pose a threat to national security or public safety.” For another, creating a legal status for Dreamers does not allow a single additional person into the country. DACA recipients must have been under 16 when they were brought here and under 31 as of June 15, 2012. And they must have resided in the United States since at least 2007. The population of potential Dreamers is fixed.

It’s nothing new for President Trump to make blatantly false and inflammatory remarks about immigration — after all, it was in the very first speech of his candidacy that he accused Mexico of “sending rapists” to the U.S. But this one has the potential to be particularly damaging. Democrats and Republicans have reportedly been conducting productive negotiations about both the Dreamers and a deal to avoid a government shutdown. For his wonton attempt to blow up that rare possibility that Washington might actually do something sensible, President Trump earns recognition for the alternative fact of the week.