



## Immigration Fight Shifts From Trump's Wall to Family Green Cards

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President Donald Trump's wall is no longer the biggest divide between Democrats and Republicans on immigration. The potential deal-breaker may be the status of mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters of immigrants.

Trump and Republican hard-liners in Congress are demanding that any agreement resolving the legal status of undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children must end the ability of citizens to sponsor siblings, parents or adult children for a green card, which confers permanent residency and all but assures citizenship over time.

In his first State of the Union address, Trump on Tuesday gave only scant mention to the wall but warned of the danger posed by criminals among undocumented immigrants and those who entered the U.S. through a visa lottery system and family sponsorships.

"Under the current broken system, a single immigrant can bring in virtually unlimited numbers of distant relatives," he said, drawing some boos from Democrats in the chamber. "Under our plan, we focus on the immediate family by limiting sponsorships to spouses and minor children. This vital reform is necessary — not just for our economy, but for our security, and for the future of America."

He called it "a down-the-middle compromise."

### **Democrats React**

Democrats didn't see it that way.

"The White House agenda is to gut legal immigration in exchange for allowing some of the Dreamers to live here," Democratic Representative Luis Guterrez of Illinois said after Trump's speech. "For those of us who support legal immigration, and that's most Democrats and many Republicans, it won't fly."

The negotiations on immigration between Congress and the White House have overwhelmed debate on most other issues and hindered action on the federal budget and spending. After Democrats used their leverage to hold up votes in the Senate on a temporary government funding bill -- triggering a three-day federal shutdown -- concessions were put on the table.

While Democrats have derided Trump's demand for a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, they've largely accepted the idea of more funding for border security -- though the amount is still in question -- including construction of barriers along some portion of the southern frontier. A resolution on that is likely to end in border security funding that Trump can sell to his core supporters as a down payment on a wall while Democrats tell their voters it's not a real wall.

The White House offered legal status for those eligible for coverage under the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, known as DACA, as well as giving them a path to citizenship over a 10- to 12-year period.

But Trump as reiterated in his address on Tuesday, he wants to close off sponsorship of immigrant parents and siblings by all U.S. citizens, which Republicans call chain migration.

Such a policy change would upend a bedrock of U.S. immigration policy since 1965 and drastically cut the number of legal immigrants let into the country.

### **Green Cards**

Family-based immigration has accounted for 60 to 70 percent of all green cards in the last decade, according to the Migration Policy Institute, a Washington-based research group. In 2013, for instance, two-thirds of the nearly 1 million green cards granted were on the basis of a family relationship.

Trump's proposal would cut legal immigration by 44 percent annually, or about half a million, and prevent some 22 million people from being able to immigrate to the U.S. over the next five decades, according to a study released Monday by the Cato Institute, a libertarian research group in Washington.

Since the White House first announced the framework, the stalemate has resumed.

Republican Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas, a Trump ally and a sponsor of legislation that would curtail legal immigration, said cutting extended-family sponsorships is "a core part" of any legalization deal. He and like-minded conservatives say immigration should be based on an individual's ability to contribute to the economy.

Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois, the lead negotiator on immigration for Democrats, said earlier this week that the limit on family migration would represent "a dramatic change" and is "one of the most serious problems in the Republican proposal."

### **Dividing Families**

"The strength of American families has been a pillar of our country for as long as I can remember," said Durbin, the No. 2 Senate Democrat. "And to limit family reunification and to

literally divide families from their children is inconsistent with the values that I thought both parties embraced.”

Frank Sharry, who runs the pro-immigration group America’s Voice, said the policy change would represent “radical nativism” and “destroy the cornerstone of our nation’s immigration history.”

It’s not clear how -- or if -- that political divide can be bridged.

There are a flurry of competing proposals on the table. Family green cards are limited to spouses and minor children in the Trump administration framework and in legislation led by Republican House Judiciary Chairman Bob Goodlatte of Virginia.

### **Competing Plans**

Competing bipartisan plans -- one in the Senate from Durbin and Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, and the other the House by a group of representatives who call themselves the Problem Solvers Caucus -- would preserve family-based immigration for American citizens while barring newly legalized “dreamers,” as the DACA recipients are called, from sponsoring extended family.

House Homeland Security Chairman Michael McCaul, a Texas Republican and cosponsor of the Goodlatte proposal, said limiting extended-family immigration is “very important” to reaching a deal to protect young beneficiaries of the DACA program that Trump has ordered to an end after March 5.

The policy change would accomplish much of what Cotton and Republican Senator David Perdue of Georgia set out to do in the RAISE Act, which they advertised as a plan to cut legal immigration in half, largely by limiting family sponsorships. Trump backed that bill at the time, and is now seeking to include its core provisions in a DACA fix.

### **Demographic Shifts**

The 1965 law has contributed to demographic shifts that have led to a fast-growing Hispanic population, which has inflamed the U.S. immigration debate and heightened racial tensions that Trump capitalized on in his 2016 campaign.

It’s a sea change from past immigration debates in 2013 and 2007, when Democrats and Republicans were largely united in favor of legal immigration. A 2013 overhaul that passed the Senate with 68 votes and stalled in the House would have narrowly limited family-based immigration -- it banned U.S. citizens from sponsoring siblings and restricted sponsorship of married children to those under 31. The bill also gave a path to citizenship for some 11 million people in the U.S. illegally and substantially expanded merit-based visas.

Graham is skeptical whether Democrats will agree to major legal immigration cuts as part of a DACA deal.

“You can make some changes to chain migration. You can get some of that. The more you give, the more you get,” Graham said. Democrats won’t give the GOP “all we want on border, merit-based immigration, and the end of family immigration based on DACA,” he said.

But that’s a tough sell for the White House -- and in the Republican-led House, which leans conservative on immigration and refused to allow a vote on Senate-passed bills in 2006 and 2013. Many fear such a scenario could repeat itself, with the Senate expected to bring up an immigration bill by Feb. 8.

Senator John Cornyn of Texas, the second-ranking Senate Republican, voiced frustration this week with the state of negotiations, tweeting: “On #DACA, both parties seem to want the quid without the quo.”