

COLORADO NEWSLINE

Rep. Neguse calls on Senate to keep immigration policy in social spending bill

Faith Miller

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The massive social spending and climate bill that passed the U.S. House last month included some significant immigration reform provisions, though progressive Democrats were disappointed that it didn't provide for a pathway to citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants, as they'd originally hoped.

While it wouldn't allow undocumented people to receive lawful permanent resident status, the so-called Build Back Better plan — the cornerstone of President Joe Biden's policy agenda — does include some immigration provisions. The House version of the \$2 trillion social spending and climate package would allow people in the United States in violation of immigration laws to retain work permits and be safe from deportation for five years.

U.S. Rep. Joe Neguse, a Lafayette Democrat, helped to get immigration policies included in the House version of the legislation. During a virtual press conference Thursday, Neguse called on the Senate to keep those provisions in its own version of Build Back Better, which is still being debated.

The House's temporary protections from deportation and work permits for certain undocumented immigrants, as well as changes to green card processing, "fundamentally will change the lives of millions of individuals," Neguse said.

The social spending package that passed the House would prevent the limited number of family- and employment-based green cards — which denote lawful permanent resident status — from being "wasted" when not all of them are issued in a given year, according to an analysis by the libertarian Cato Institute.

Marissa Molina immigrated to the U.S. as a child without proper documentation. She later applied and received protection from deportation under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, known as DACA.

In July, a federal judge in Texas ruled that the program could not accept new applicants, but the Department of Homeland Security can still renew DACA status for people who were already enrolled.

“The American people are ready for Congress to deliver a meaningful solution to our immigration problems,” said Molina, who is the state immigration director for FWD.us, a national organization that lobbies for immigration and criminal justice reforms. Molina spoke during the news conference with Neguse.

A November poll conducted by Morning Consult and Politico, which drew from a sample of 1,999 registered voters, estimated that 49% of voters strongly supported or somewhat supported the Build Back Better plan passed by the House, while 38% were somewhat opposed or strongly opposed. The remaining 13% of voters said they didn’t know or had no opinion.

About two-thirds of Americans think people who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children should have a way to become citizens, according to a May poll from NPR and Ipsos. Around 70% said the same about people who fled countries suffering from war or climate disaster with temporary protected status, and 71% said the same of farmworkers and other essential workers, according to the poll, which drew from a sample of 1,176 adults.

The Vail Valley Partnership, an economic development organization for Eagle County, supports pro-immigration policies, President and CEO Chris Romer said during the news conference. The region’s labor shortage calls for an increase in immigration, he said.

“Immigration brings entrepreneurs that start new businesses that hire our workers,” Romer said. “Immigration brings young workers to help offset the large-scale retirement of baby boomers.”

Immigrant workers are a “quiet force” behind Colorado’s ski industry, added Javier Pineda, a DACA recipient and community activist who also spoke during the call.

Pineda called on Colorado’s Democratic Sens. Michael Bennet and John Hickenlooper to support keeping the immigration provisions in the social spending bill.