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Schumer says Trump's immigrant plan a no-go

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Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer on Friday voiced opposition to the White House's immigration proposal aimed at breaking a congressional impasse over a long-term budget deal, prompting President Donald Trump to lash out at him and injecting renewed uncertainty into the negotiations.

The proposal outlined Thursday by the White House would end much family-based immigration and the visa lottery program, moves that some experts estimate could cut legal immigration into the United States nearly in half.

Schumer, D-N.Y., waited overnight to react to the plan, which would provide a path to citizenship for up to 1.8 million young illegal immigrants, along with increased border security.

Schumer dismissed the plan Friday as a "wish list" for hard-liners. He acknowledged the bipartisan common ground on protections for the immigrants now shielded by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. But he accused Trump of using them as "a tool to tear apart our legal immigration system and adopt the wish list that anti-immigration hardliners have advocated for years."

Democrats forced a government shutdown last weekend in an attempt to expedite negotiations over the "Dreamers," who are set to lose protection from deportation in March. Trump's proposal was the first detailed public offer from the White House.

On Friday, the president accused Schumer of complicating the talks. "DACA has been made increasingly difficult by the fact that Cryin' Chuck Schumer took such a beating over the shutdown that he is unable to act on immigration!" Trump wrote on Twitter.

The fresh dispute illustrated the difficult path forward for Congress as it negotiates ahead of a Feb. 8 must-pass government spending bill. Many Democrats and some Republicans have said they will not support a long-term funding bill that does not provide deportation protections for Dreamers.

That term is based on the never-passed DREAM Act, or Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, that would have given protections similar to those provided by the deferred-action program.

The Senate's failure to strike an immigration deal last week resulted in a three-day partial shutdown before lawmakers agreed Monday on a three-week funding extension that reopened government offices. Despite Trump's taunts of Schumer, some polls suggested more Americans blamed Trump and Republicans for the shutdown than they did Democrats.

On Friday, Ben Marter, communications director for Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., a lead negotiator, said Democrats have not been briefed by the White House. In a tweet, Marter said the White House canceled a briefing for a bipartisan group of senators that had been set for Monday with Chief of Staff John Kelly and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen.

"We have yet to receive so much as a fact sheet," Marter wrote.

White House aides said Kelly remained in Washington to continue talks with Congress during Trump's two-day visit to an economic conference in Davos, Switzerland. But Kelly had not visited lawmakers as of Friday afternoon.

Trump's Twitter attack on Schumer, made as the president was flying back from Davos to Washington aboard Air Force One, came just hours after he had suggested he would take a more diplomatic tone in the immigration talks.

Before Schumer had publicly reacted to the bill, Trump was asked in an interview with CNBC on Friday whether Democrats were prepared to shut down the government a second time in three weeks if an immigration deal is not reached.

"No," Trump said. "Because you look at every poll, it said they made a mistake."

He added: "I don't want to say Schumer got badly beaten. Why should I do that? I'm negotiating with someone -- I'm not going to say he got badly beaten."

Trump is entering a crucial stretch for his proposal. On Tuesday, he will deliver the State of the Union address to a bicameral gathering of Congress, and aides confirmed he will make a case for his immigration agenda during the speech.

In the days after the speech, the president is reportedly eyeing a visit to San Diego to review prototypes for his proposed border wall. The Department of Homeland Security has requested \$18 billion to build and refurbish a total of 700 miles of walls and fencing.

'CULTURAL ANXIETY'

By including curbs to legal immigration in his proposal, Trump elevated ideas that have been advocated by a some hard-liners for decades, although with little momentum in Washington. Trump has framed the proposals as an attempt to prioritize immigrants with specific skills rather than family connections.

The U.S. takes in about 1 million legal immigrants annually, and nearly 13 percent of the country's residents were born overseas, the highest share in nearly a century. Immigration hawks argue that the influx drives down native-born Americans' wages and strains public resources.

"When you're bringing in the equivalent of a major metropolitan area every year, that has an impact on every aspect of life," said Ira Mehlman of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a major group advocating for fewer immigrants.

But many economists and businesses say there's little data showing that immigration is bad for the economy, and much showing it is a net benefit. Though a few have found that immigrants can depress some workers' wages, most believe there's little negative impact on U.S. workers. In fact, because native-born U.S. citizens are having fewer and fewer children, some warn that the

U.S. faces a looming worker shortage and that immigrants are essential to keep the country growing.

A panel from the National Academy of Sciences in 2016 found that immigration had a small negative impact on some native-born workers who hadn't graduated from high school but also had many important benefits, such as fueling growth, innovation and entrepreneurship.

"At the end of the day. We're either going to believe the data coming from businesses that are trying to grow the nation's economy or we can believe press statements," said Ali Noorani of the National Immigration Forum, which supports increasing immigration. "Ultimately, this is not a question about economics. This is about the cultural anxiety coursing through the country that has been given an outlet by saying 'immigrants are taking our jobs.'"

The nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute said the proposed cuts to legal immigration could amount to an annual decrease of at least 288,000 green cards -- 36 percent of the total number issued to family members of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents.

Alex Nowrasteh of the conservative Cato Institute estimates that the result could be a 40 percent to 45 percent reduction in overall immigration over time.

Still, some immigration hawks were disappointed with the plan, arguing it could take decades before the reductions kick in. "The cuts in immigration don't happen for 15 years," complained Roy Beck of Numbers USA.

Trump-aligned candidates from Nevada and Virginia rejected the plan outright. A loyal media ally, Breitbart News, attacked him as "Amnesty Don." And outside groups that cheered the hard-line rhetoric that dominated Trump's campaign warned of fierce backlash against the president's party in November's midterm elections.

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, wrote in the *National Review* that if Trump's framework becomes law it "will fatally demoralize Republican voters in November."

"There's a Trump movement. And It's not necessarily about Donald Trump," said Corey Stewart, a Republican Senate candidate in Virginia and a vocal Trump ally. "It's about the things that Donald Trump campaigned and stood for during his campaign. Ultimately, every elected leader needs to stay true to the message that they ran on, otherwise people will leave them."

Much of the country, including independents and moderate Republicans, favor protections for thousands of young people brought to the country as children illegally and raised here through no fault of their own. But a vocal conservative faction emboldened by Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric will never accept anything viewed as "amnesty." And many view legal protection for these young immigrants as just that.

"It is concerning why anyone would attempt to repeat history by granting amnesty," said Mississippi state Sen. Chris McDaniel, who is considering a primary challenge against Republican Sen. Roger Wicker. McDaniel likened the Trump proposal to the "amnesty" granted in 1986 immigration overhaul backed by President Ronald Reagan.

In Nevada, where Trump loyalty is the centerpiece of Republican Danny Tarkanian's primary challenge against Sen. Dean Heller, Tarkanian also broke from the president.

"It's his decision," Tarkanian said of Trump. "But I don't believe we should grant citizenship to people who have come to the country illegally."

The consequences could be severe for the GOP as it tries to energize voters heading into the 2018 midterm elections, when Republican majorities in the House and Senate are at stake.

Protections for Dreamers could trigger wholesale revolt by Trump's base in November, said Bob Dane, executive director of the conservative Federation for American Immigration Reform.

"There's widespread fear that if Trump capitulates to the Democrats and fails to deliver on his campaign promises on immigration, there's not going to be any more campaign promises for the GOP to make in the future, because the base will inflict a scorched-earth policy in midterms," Dane said.