



Immigration Matters

[Let Illegal Migrants Choose their Status? An Even Worse Idea](#)

By Stanley Renshon

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[Conn Carroll's](#) idea for reaching an immigration compromise is to let illegal migrants who are eligible for legalization choose whether they wish to be on a "pathway to citizenship" track or not. His suggestion is based on the erroneous view that those being offered legalization would first have to leave the country and then reapply. This was not part of the Senate immigration bill, and as far as I know, has not been put forward anywhere else as a compromise option (though it was raised, and dismissed, during the legislative debates of 2005-07).

However, there is now another, but worse, version of this idea. In a Cato Institute blog entry entitled "Path to Citizenship vs. Legalization: Let the Immigrants Choose," [Alex Nowrasteh](#) suggests, "creating two paths toward legal status".

He continues:

The first path should lead to permanent legal status on a work permit that cannot be used to earn a green card unless the person marries an American or serves in the military (other categories should be considered too). This path could be relatively easy and cheap, preferably a few hundred dollars to pay for the paperwork processing fee as well as criminal, national security, and health checks.

The second path should be toward a green card and eventual citizenship. It should probably be similar to the Senate plan, take many years, and cost more money. This should be the more difficult legalization process but it should not be any more difficult than what is included in the Senate bill.

Creating two paths will allow the unauthorized immigrants themselves to choose the type of legal status they wish to have in the United States. This also addresses some of the concerns of immigration reform skeptics while actually allowing a path to citizenship that, theoretically, most unauthorized immigrants could follow. Furthermore, this plan is probably more politically feasible than a one sized fits all path to legal status. The sooner a reform is passed, the sooner the deportations can stop.

Currently every interest group involved in immigration reform is trying to choose which legal status unauthorized immigrants should have. The unauthorized immigrant should instead be able to choose for themselves.

Nowrasteh presents his proposal as a way to bypass the impasse between Democrats, who "will not support immigration reform unless *some* unauthorized immigrants are allowed to become citizens eventually" (emphasis added), and the possible plan of [Rep. Robert Goodlatte](#) (R-Va.) that would, in Nowrasteh's words, "shrink the number of unauthorized immigrants who could eventually earn a green card or gain citizenship."

I wasn't aware that the Democratic position is that only "some" of the estimated 11.7 million illegal migrants in the United States should be able to gain citizenship. I thought the president's position was [rather clear](#): "Obama instead signaled that he might consider a package of smaller bills, if necessary, as long as they provide a path to citizenship for the estimated 11 million people in the country without legal status."

In fact, the very *Wall Street Journal* article on Rep. Goodlatte's plan that Nowrasteh quotes contains this line: "Because existing law makes it difficult to qualify for a green card, only a sliver of the 11 million people now here illegally might actually make it to citizenship under the concept. That is why Rep. Goodlatte's idea also is encountering resistance from some advocates for immigrants on the left."

Of course if Mr. Nowrasteh's idea is adapted, Democrats will not need to worry since his plan, by his own estimation, would allow, "a path to citizenship that, theoretically, *most* unauthorized immigrants could follow"(emphasis added).

But that is not the only problem with his plan.