



## Democrats need to read fine print of Trump's immigration plan, experts say

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May 30, 2019

The president's proposal for a more "merit-based" immigration system has some liberal critics crying "racism," but experts say Democrats who dig deeper may discover they are fans of the latest White House plan.

President Trump laid out a new proposal for the U.S. immigration system earlier this month that focused heavily on the idea of increasing the number of visas granted based on skill or merit.

"Only 12 percent of legal immigrants [to the U.S.] are selected based on skill or based on merit," Trump said in his May 16 Rose Garden remarks. "In countries like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand," he added, "that number is closer to 60 and even 70 and 75 percent, in some cases."

Earlier this week, Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., suggested in a Tweet (that was subsequently deleted) that "A 'merit based' immigration policy is fueled by racism towards the Latinx community."

The congresswoman was quickly rebuffed on social media, but some experts say this kind of response is to be expected from the president's most die-hard critics on the left, even if this new proposal proves the administration is taking a step in the right direction.

"Short of a no-strings-attached mass amnesty, it is difficult to envision Democrats in the House endorsing any legislative proposal from the Trump White House on an issue that has proved so divisive, and so richly resonant to left-of-center activists and donors [as immigration]," writes Reihan Salam, author of "Melting Pot or Civil War?: A Son of Immigrants Makes the Case Against Open Borders."

Salam, who is also president of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, calls the president's proposal a step in the right direction. "Rather than reducing the number of green cards the U.S. grants every year," he argues, "Trump is now calling for rebalancing admissions to ensure that a higher proportion of new immigrants are poised to achieve labor-market success."

The president's plan "promotes our common language," according to the White House, and would create something called "the 'Build America Visa,' which will select immigrants based on a point system and features three high-skill categories: Extraordinary talent, Professional and specialized vocations, Exceptional academic track records."

Canada's immigration system similarly uses factors like skills, education, language ability and work experience to determine visa eligibility via a points-based system. There is even an online portal to help calculate your points before applying.

Experts argue comments like those from Omar suggest some of the president's critics would do well to look closer at the president's proposal.

"I think it might surprise them because it doesn't go out of its way to cut legal immigration," according to Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity. "It shows the president and his advisors know cutting legal immigration is a bad tactic, both politically and for the future of our country."

Nowrasteh also takes issues with the statistics being touted by the White House regarding skilled-worker visas in other countries. According to the White House, skilled workers account for 63 percent of legal immigration in Canada, and just 12 percent in the U.S. Even if those numbers were correct, Nowrasteh says, "as a percentage of Canada's population they let in about twice as many immigrants annually as the U.S. does compared with our population."

"So if we really want to copy the Canadian system," Nowrasteh says, "we have to increase legal immigration across the board... including refugees."

Salam seems to believe that the president may have inadvertently invited the criticism with a plan that is chock full of lofty and level-headed goals, but lacking on specifics. "The vagueness of the proposal has allowed the president's critics to paint it in the darkest possible light," Salam says. "But it is easy to see how a more refined proposal would prove broadly popular among conservatives and moderates, which is why the Trump White House would be wise to stay the course."

Nowrasteh agrees that the plan, which was largely influenced by Trump's advisor and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, could use a few tweaks. And he thinks Kushner's role on the president's thinking, as evidenced by this particular proposal, is positive and hopefully prolonged.

"We don't need to cut green cards in one area to add to another," Nowrasteh told Fox News. "If the Kushner plan kept in the family-based system but then increased immigration for skilled workers," he adds, "I think that would have a very good shot at passing and that would produce a much more balanced, merit-based immigration system."