



## Trump softens his immigration rhetoric

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WASHINGTON—Donald Trump’s immigration rhetoric has taken a sudden, drastic turn—and it appears a change in his immigration policy may not be far behind.

The Republican presidential nominee has made tough talk on immigration a cornerstone of his campaign since he launched his long-shot White House bid more than a year ago. Trump still promises to build a wall on the southern U.S. border, but he’s now backing off his pledge to employ a “deportation force” to remove the country’s roughly 11 million illegal immigrants.

“No citizenship,” Trump told Sean Hannity, a Fox News personality and Trump supporter, on Wednesday night. “Let me go a step further—they’ll pay back taxes, they have to pay taxes, there’s no amnesty, as such, there’s no amnesty, but we work with them.”

The definition of “amnesty” remains the subject of much debate. Merriam-Webster defines it as a “pardon,” not the restitution Trump has suggested, but many immigration hawks say it means anything short of mass deportations.

“Many of the voters who stuck with him through his various antics will start drifting away, so that in any state where the results are close in November could plausibly have been won if Trump hadn’t pulled a Schumer,” Mark Krikorian, a leading advocate for lower immigration levels, wrote for *National Review*, comparing Trump’s new stance to Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer’s views on immigration reform.

Supporters of Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, Trump’s chief rival in the GOP primaries, have pounced on Trump’s evolution, saying they predicted it long ago. Cruz has said he strongly supports legal immigration but has consistently argued illegal immigrants should receive no mercy.

Trump’s articulated position puts him more in line with his campaign’s website, which calls for deporting all “criminal aliens” but not every person who crossed the border without papers. The shift also puts him in line with former GOP rivals Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida and former

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush. Trump often mocked Bush during debates for his weakness on immigration.

“It is unsurprising that Donald Trump is finally faced with reconciling his immigration policy with reality, something Gov. Bush predicted last year,” Bush spokeswoman Kristy Campbell said.

Trump’s softened stance drew praise from some of his most ardent critics, including Erick Erickson, founder of the conservative website The Resurgent, who helped launch the “Never Trump” movement.

“We should be thanking him for seeing the light,” Erickson wrote. He said Trump agrees illegal immigrants should not receive citizenship, but “I also agree the GOP, which is the party of families, should not be in the business of separating families.”

Most Americans hold the same view. According to Pew Research, 75 percent of Americans support a path for legal status for the undocumented population.

Trump’s change may show the influence of running mate Mike Pence, who as a congressman advocated for a robust guest worker program in conjunction with border security measures to control illegal immigration. Pence’s integrated approach reflects the reality that enforcement-only laws—especially the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996—have not solved the problem, but instead allowed transnational criminal organizations to flourish.

Daniel Garza, executive director of the Libre Initiative, a conservative group that advocates for immigration reform, said he welcomes Trump’s more “pragmatic” position but wants to know more details. He said his group has not heard enough to support the new proposal.

“We need to allow our private sector to adequately address market forces, induce family cohesion, and get so many young children and students fully assimilated,” Garza said.

Alex Nowrasteh, the Cato Institute’s chief immigration analyst, told me Trump is only moderating his language. He said since Trump still advocates for a border wall, interior enforcement, and cuts in legal immigration, he has sealed his electoral fate.

“Trump is doomed with Hispanic voters,” Nowrasteh said. “There is nothing he can do.”