



The House's terrible immigration framework

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With government funding securely in place and Congress no longer preoccupied with the threat of an imminent shutdown, both chambers will likely move onto finding a solution for the DREAMers. But at least one chamber may settle on a solution that's worse than nothing.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) both have signaled that they are ready to consider legislation enabling some sort of legal status for the roughly 700,000 illegal immigrants brought to this country as children. These DREAMers, who thought that President Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program would grant them security, lost that security when President Trump rescinded the program last year.

Enter the Securing America's Future Act, which nearly 40 percent of the House Republican Conference is co-sponsoring. President Trump has signaled his support for this legislation, and it looks likely that it will be the line in the sand House Republicans draw in the event of a conference with the Senate.

As a so-called DACA fix, the SAF Act barely measures up. It would provide DREAMers with temporary and renewable residency permits—in other words, short-term reprieves. And in return, DREAMers would face a new set of restrictions, including the requirement that they maintain an income 125 percent higher than the poverty line.

But in supposedly finding a DACA solution the SAF Act inexplicably cuts legal immigration, reducing the number of immigrants by as much as half after 10 years. Among the categories cut are the diversity green card, which is completely eliminated, as well as most family-sponsored immigrants. Asylum seekers will also get a significant chop under the bill.

Under the new SAF Act status quo, immigration would allow fewer skill-based immigrants, due to the move away from the green card system's growing tendency to select educated workers. It also means that immigrants might risk separation from their family—the SAF Act would make it almost impossible for green card recipients to sponsor their spouse or children if their marriage or the child's birth occur after the green card is conferred.

And as a cherry on top, the SAF Act allocates to border security approximately \$124 billion over five years. This is dozens of times more money than Border Patrol spent last year, and at a time when illegal crossings at the border are at a nadir.

There's no way to sugarcoat the SAF Act as any kind of concession or compromise. It is give and take, with an emphasis on take. And although Democrats will likely not support the bill, at the end of the day the SAF Act will likely be House Republicans' starting point in any negotiations. With that in mind, some of the provisions of SAF will likely become law.

The Republican supporters of SAF are pushing against the tide of popular opinion. Only about 35 percent of Americans want to reduce immigration according to Gallup, down from 65 percent in the mid-1990s. Since 1995, the number of Americans who want to increase immigration has surged from 7 percent to 24 percent. This Congress could be the last chance for immigration restrictionists to reduce legal immigration, as the long-run trends are supportive of immigrants. The SAF Act is a hard marker for Republicans and signals their intent to try hard to cut the numbers.

A few years ago, cutting legal immigration was a fringe opinion in political debates. Now, much of the Republican Conference is supporting a bill to do just that. There are better ways to resolve the ongoing immigration debate than this scorched-earth option. Congress can legalize the DREAMers and boost border security without attacks on legal immigration.

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