



Did Adam Putnam endorse the Gang of Eight immigration amnesty?

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Republican candidate for Florida governor Adam Putnam has been accused of not being conservative enough — especially when it comes to immigration.

The attacks continued during a nationally televised Fox News Republican debate. Putnam's opponent, U.S. Rep. Ron DeSantis, accused Putnam of voting for amnesty on immigration three times.

"When he was acting commissioner (Putnam) endorsed the Obama-Schumer Gang of Immigration amnesty," DeSantis said. "The biggest amnesty in history, it would have lowered wages for American workers and it would have created an incentive to come illegally."

We have looked at Putnam's record on immigration multiple times, but this time we wanted to take a close look at the specific "Gang of Eight" legislation. Did Putnam endorse the "Obama-Schumer Gang of immigration amnesty?"

Putnam did voice support of the Gang of Eight bill, but it's worth noting that the bill was bipartisan and supported by several prominent Republicans. Characterizing the bill as amnesty requires additional context, too.

"Gang of Eight" legislation

In June 2013 while he was Florida's agriculture commissioner, Putnam told reporters that he supported the "Gang of Eight" bill, which he saw as a benefit to multiple industries including agriculture.

"It makes improvements at the border and employee verification, while also creating a more modern visa program so that jobs in our economy can be filled when there is a shortfall of domestic labor," he told the Lakeland Ledger. "That has been particularly acute in agriculture."

The bill would have eliminated the diversity lottery program, set up a path to legal status and an eventual opportunity for citizenship.

It also would have allowed the president to designate certain groups outside the United States as particularly at risk, and other officials to label certain refugees in the United States as having nowhere to go. It further would have repealed the deadline for refugees already here to apply for asylum.

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., was one of the four Democrats who supported the bill, and it was endorsed by former President Barack Obama.

But the "Gang of Eight" actually refers to a bipartisan group of eight United States senators Democrats and four Republicans. So, the bill also -- at least for a time -- had support of prominent senators Jeff Flake, R-Az., Marco Rubio, R-Fla., Lindsey Graham, R- S.C., and John McCain R-Az.

The bill passed the Senate, 68-32. Fourteen Republicans joined 52 Democrats and two independent Senators in voting for the bill. The bill did not get a hearing in the House.

Is it immigration amnesty?

DeSantis called the bill "immigration amnesty" and that requires additional context. As we've concluded in the past, defining amnesty is tricky.

Some view it as blanket permission for undocumented immigrants to remain in the United States, while others view amnesty as any measure that is favorable to any undocumented immigrants, even if it includes a list of tough measures they have to meet.

Republicans who supported the legislation emphasized the bill was not amnesty.

"This is not amnesty," Rubio said on *Fox News Sunday* on April 14, 2013. "Amnesty is the forgiveness of something. Amnesty is anything that says do it illegally, it will be cheaper and easier."

We rated Rubio's claim Half True. We found that the bill does not offer blanket legal residency to unauthorized immigrants. The bill mandated fines, background checks and waiting periods, and it's tougher than its 1986 predecessor. But it also offered a measure of clemency to those immigrants, who would not be required to return to their home countries.

"This bill includes numerous punishments for unauthorized immigrants who broke the laws, including paying fines and other legal sanctions," Alex Nowrasteh with the libertarian Cato Institute told PolitiFact in 2013. "If it was amnesty they would be legalized immediately with no punishment, no process. They would just be forgiven and handed a green card."

Our ruling

DeSantis said Putnam "endorsed the Schumer-Obama Gang of Eight immigration amnesty."

Putnam endorsed a bill that laid out a path to legal status and eventual opportunity for citizenship, but several prominent Republicans also supported it, including Rubio.

Calling the bill amnesty is also at least partially misleading. The bill did not offer blanket legal residency to unauthorized immigrants. The bill mandated fines, background checks and waiting periods

DeSantis has the endorsement right but the details beyond that require some clarification. We rate this claim Mostly True.