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## Mulvaney says U.S. is ‘desperate’ for more legal immigrants

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Acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney told a crowd at a private gathering in England on Wednesday night that the Trump administration “needs more immigrants” for the U.S. economy to continue growing, according to an audio recording of his remarks obtained by The Washington Post.

“We are desperate — desperate — for more people,” Mulvaney said. “We are running out of people to fuel the economic growth that we’ve had in our nation over the last four years. We need more immigrants.”

The Trump administration wants those immigrants to come in a “legal fashion,” Mulvaney said, according to the recording.

Mulvaney’s remarks appear in contrast to the public position of several top figures in Trump’s White House — especially that of senior policy adviser Stephen Miller — who have been working to slash legal and illegal immigration through a slew of policies that aim to close off the U.S. border to foreigners. They have insisted that the steady arrival of newcomers depresses wages for the blue-collar U.S. workers whose votes helped lift Trump to the presidency in 2016.

During a visit to the border last year amid a record surge of Central American families and children crossing into the United States, the president said the country could not absorb more newcomers.

“Our country is full,” Trump said. “Can’t take you anymore . . . so turn around.”

Mulvaney’s private remarks were more in line with conventional GOP views of immigration as a major engine for the U.S. economy. The White House chief of staff told the crowd of several hundred people at Oxford Union that despite the president’s “anti-immigrant” reputation, his administration wants more foreign workers.

He praised the immigration systems in Canada and Australia and said the Trump administration wants the United States to embrace a model closer to those nations. “We are very interested in expanding that,” he said.

Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law, has made similar arguments in advocating for giving higher priority to highly skilled immigrants instead of those seeking to reunite with family

members already living in the United States. His plan for legal immigration has not received congressional approval and remains unlikely to do so in Trump’s first term, administration officials said.

Hard-line immigration restrictionists want fewer new arrivals — legal and illegal — arguing that immigrants increase wage competition against U.S. workers. Miller and former Trump adviser Stephen K. Bannon embraced those arguments during the president’s 2016 campaign, which they argued were key to his electoral strategy in Rust Belt states that have suffered from job losses and wage stagnation.

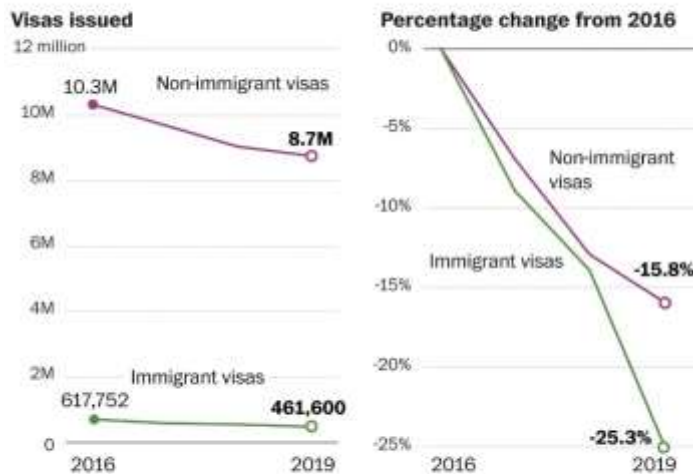
Trump has waffled on the subject, at times suggesting that he would like to curb legal immigration and at times saying he would like to increase it.

“If everyone from Bangladesh moved here, the economy would get bigger. Would the economic condition of people already here get better? Is it necessary to increase immigration to improve the condition of Americans who are already here? The answer is no,” said Mark Krikorian, director of the Center for Immigration Studies, whose arguments for lower immigration levels have influenced Miller and others in the administration.

“A tight labor market is the best social policy,” he said. “We’re seeing an uptick in wages for less-skilled workers, as well as incentives for employers to recruit ex-cons, disabled people, in general workers they would not consider if the job market were looser.”

### Visas since 2016

The number of visas issued has fallen dramatically since 2016, with immigrant visas being cut by more than 25 percent.



NOTE: Immigrant visas are issued to foreign nationals who intend to live and work in the United States. Non-immigrant visas are issued to foreign nationals seeking to enter the United States on a temporary basis for tourism, business, medical treatment and certain types of temporary work.

Source: State Department

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Trump has bucked several decades of bipartisan enthusiasm for immigration, buttressing the system with an array of physical and legal barriers. The president is building hundreds of miles of steel barriers along the boundary with Mexico while slashing refugee admissions to their lowest level on record.

His administration has essentially closed the U.S. southern border to those who arrive seeking protection from persecution and has for the past year been sending asylum seekers to the Mexican side of the border to wait for their U.S. court hearings under a program his administration calls the “Migrant Protection Protocols.” The administration moving away from the MPP program and is instead flying asylum seekers to Guatemala and is fast-tracking deportations.

The president’s “Make America Great Again” campaign message harks back to a more homogeneous time in U.S. history, before the demographic changes that were brought by globalization and relatively high levels of immigration.

Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, said Mulvaney’s statements were very much in line with the views he often expressed as a GOP congressman from South Carolina.

“Mulvaney in Congress was hugely supportive of expanding immigration, and the great thing about having him in this position is that he’s been a voice of sanity, reason and support for the mainstream economic consensus on immigration, which is that it’s good for economy,” Nowrasteh said, noting that there is a strong contingent of people in the Republican Party and in the administration who support liberalizing immigration because of the economic benefits.

“They have been overshadowed by the Stephen Millers in the administration,” he said, “but the evidence is overwhelming that if you want to expand the economy, having more people who are consumers, workers and investors is the way to go.”

Trump has sent mixed signals in his speeches.

“Legal immigrants enrich our nation and strengthen our society in countless ways,” the president said in his 2019 State of the Union address. “I want people to come into our country in the largest numbers ever, but they have to come in legally.”

That line alarmed restrictionists but essentially said the same thing Mulvaney did to the crowd at Oxford Union.

Such praises were notably absent in this year’s State of the Union address, when Trump’s statements focused on sanctuary cities and crimes committed by immigrants. The president held a rally earlier this month in which he also performed a routine he calls “The Snake” about a kind woman who nurses a frozen snake back to health, only to have it bite her with fatal venom. The story is a parable about immigration, Trump said.