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Trump just squashed the last, best chance Washington had this year to protect 'dreamers'

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Republicans in Congress *had* a plan to try to protect young undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children, even if it was an extremely tenuous one. But President Trump just stomped all over that on Friday.

"I'm looking at both of them," Trump told "Fox and Friends" on Friday morning in an impromptu interview on the White House lawn, speaking of two immigration bills that could get a vote next week in the House of Representatives. "I certainly wouldn't sign the more moderate one."

With that, any immigration compromise House Republicans had planned to vote on becomes almost instantly moot. And so does Congress' ability to protect the young immigrants known as "dreamers," for the foreseeable future — at least until there are elections in November and a new Congress.

After facing an insurgency from their own ranks, House Republicans had decided to vote on two immigration bills next week: 1) a conservative bill that Trump seems open to signing into law because it cuts legal immigration in exchange for some protections for dreamers, and 2) a more moderate bill that would give dreamers a path to permanent residency in exchange for \$25 billion for the president's border wall.

But only the moderate bill had the slightest chance of making it to Trump's desk. That's because any immigration bill would need a majority vote in the House and Senate. And a majority of lawmakers from both parties don't support the proposals in the conservative bill to cut legal immigration, such as scaling back the number of citizens allowed to sponsor family members and canceling a visa lottery.

"There's just not much of an appetite to cut legal immigration," Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute said to The Fix earlier this week, calling it a fringe issue for "immigration restrictionists."

The moderate bill was a longshot too, but it didn't have as many poison pills. And yet the moderate bill is the one Trump just dissed.

That makes it very unlikely House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) would put it to a vote on the House floor next week as he originally planned. That would put Ryan and his vulnerable House majority on the hook if a bill that Trump — and Trump's passionately loyal voter base — doesn't like passes the House. Just days ago, Ryan had told GOP lawmakers he had the support of the administration on this vote. It looks like he was mistaken (or Trump abruptly changed his mind).

Trump's pooh-poohing of the moderate immigration bill also makes it less likely that moderate Republicans can convince some of their conservative counterparts, or skeptical Democrats, to vote for it. Why would they take a politically risky vote when the president probably won't sign it into law?

The bottom line is that Republican Party may be just too ideologically spread out to come to a compromise on its own about immigration. House Democrats and moderate House Republicans had tried to come together on a petition to force a vote on a bill they supported, but that stalled earlier this week just two signatures shy of success

All of this effort to get a vote on two bills may have been as much for show as anything else. As I wrote on Wednesday as House Republican leaders pieced together their compromise plan to avoid that petition from succeeding:

This whole immigration push in the House, from both the moderate and conservative factions, is such a logjam that it's fair to wonder whether anyone genuinely thought their idea could get a majority of support from Congress. Congress hasn't been in any rush to solve dreamers' legal limbo since their fate got tied up in the courts this year.

"I'm not sure whether anyone has really expected anything to become law out of this whole exercise," Molly Reynolds, a congressional expert with Brookings Institution, said.

But it's clear Friday that the logjam isn't just coming from Congress. Lawmakers at least were willing to take a chance and hold votes on immigration. The main roadblock to getting something done on the dreamers is the White House.

Of course, that Trump scuttled a congressional immigration deal at the last minute shouldn't be a surprise to Congress. In September, Democratic leaders left a dinner at the White House saying they had a deal to protect dreamers. But he tweeted shortly after 6 a.m. the next morning there was "no deal."