



Loyal Trump Republican moves to cut off all noncitizens from government assistance programs

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A congressman who is considered among the most loyal supporters of former President Donald Trump is pushing Congress to go further than even the previous administration attempted with a move to bar immigrants from federal assistance programs.

Rep. Glenn Grothman, a Wisconsin Republican, introduced this month the Smarter Plan for Immigrant Welfare bill to expand guidelines for eligibility for any kind of welfare or government assistance. Since 1996, when the last major welfare legislation was passed, only immigrants who have green cards, or legal permanent residents, were allowed to request assistance.

The Trump administration had proposed a plan to update existing rules so that the government would have the ability to block immigrants who apply for green cards on the basis that they may rely on federal assistance and would be a "public charge" to the government. That effort is now being reviewed and expected to be undone by the White House.

But over on Capitol Hill, Grothman wants lawmakers to take it a step further and bar all noncitizens from getting so much as a penny from any federal programs.

"We can only take so many immigrants. We're swearing in another 700,000, a little under that, per year," said Grothman. "You should go back home and prepare yourself and put yourself in a position in which you can get a job. But, if you can't get a job, then they can take care of you and whichever country you came from."

Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies for the libertarian Cato Institute, supported the bill in 2018 and backs it again this time around on the basis that all noncitizens "should not have access to welfare."

"The public charge rule was a poorly conceived way to reduce non-citizen access to welfare, left a lot up to the arbitrary whims of bureaucrats, and ultimately would be used to keep productive immigrants out rather than reduce the burden of welfare," Nowrasteh wrote in an email.

"Grothman's bill, on the other hand, attacks the root problem."

Existing laws do not allow immigrants visiting the United States on any variety of visas to apply for welfare through the cash assistance program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or Supplemental Security Income for disabled people. For other programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Children's Health Insurance Program, recipients generally must be green card holders.

The 11 million illegal immigrants in the U.S., including people protected from deportation by Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and the Temporary Protected Status program, are ineligible for all four programs. International students and agricultural workers, among a plethora of others in the U.S. on a temporary legal basis, are also ineligible. That also means anyone who evades getting caught while sneaking over the border or someone who overstays a visa cannot apply for these programs.

The only programs that do apply to everyone are nutrition programs for children in school because all children, regardless of immigration status, must be enrolled in schools. Women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, and recovering from childbirth, as well as infants and children up to age five, will receive limited amounts of assistance for food.

Medicaid is also not available to millions of illegal immigrants, just for green card holders and people protected from deportation.

A study by the Washington-based immigration restrictionist group Center for Immigration Studies states that nearly twice as many noncitizen households in the U.S. relied on some sort of government assistance in 2014 compared to American citizen households.

Grothman claimed that President Biden's push to give a pathway to citizenship to 11 million illegal immigrants would prompt "many" to "use their new legal status to apply for additional welfare benefits and not work."

Randy Capps, U.S. programs research director at the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., said that it is a popular misconception of many benefits programs.

"The reality is that a large majority of people receiving these programs, SNAP and Medicaid, are working. SNAP, this supplemental assistance, it's a little bit of money for additional food. It can be as little as like \$10 a month. It definitely can't replace income from work. It's not unemployment insurance," Capps said. "And Medicaid, of course, many people who work in this country do not get health insurance through their employers. And that's especially more true among immigrants. The uninsured rate for immigrants is much higher than it is for the general public."

Capps suggested minimum wage reforms as a viable way to increase wages, which would automatically put workers, including Americans, out of the qualification range for wage-restricted government assistance programs.

Grothman has four co-sponsors but has yet to add any Democratic co-sponsors. Nowrasteh suggested trading a pathway to citizenship for the millions of immigrants illegally living in the U.S. or expanding legal immigration avenues as a way to attract Democrats. Despite its low chances of moving forward, Grothman said his focus is keeping immigration on Republicans' minds.

"Talking about it should make it a platform for Republicans should they take charge in two years," he said.