



Trump says he'll be 'signing something' to end child separation policy

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Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen has drafted an executive action for U.S. President Donald Trump that would direct her department to keep families together after they are detained crossing the border illegally. She was at the White House where Trump told reporters he would be "signing something" shortly.

The effort to end what has become a major crisis for the Trump administration was outlined by two people familiar with Nielsen's thinking who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the effort before its official announcement.

It's unclear exactly what the president might be supporting, but he said he would be signing something "in a little while."

"We want to keep families together," he said.

The effort would mark a dramatic departure for an administration that has been insisting, wrongly, that it has no choice but to separate families apprehended at the border because of the law and a court decision.

About 2,300 children have been separated from their families since April after the U.S. announced a new "zero-tolerance" policy that refers all cases of illegal entry for criminal prosecution even though traditionally most would ultimately be deported, with some serving short jail sentences.

Republicans in the House, where every seat is up for grabs in the November midterm elections, are desperate to move on from the controversy.

U.S. Speaker Paul Ryan said the House would vote Thursday on a pair of Republican-driven immigration bills amid mounting criticism over the forced separation of children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Ryan and fellow Republicans have found themselves on the defensive, scrambling to craft legislation as videos of youngsters in cages and an audiotape of wailing children have sparked anger from groups ranging from clergy to influential business leaders, as well as condemnation abroad.

"We do not want children taken away from parents," said Ryan. "We can enforce our immigration laws without breaking families apart."

Ryan said families would remain together under Department of Homeland Security custody under the proposed legislation, the passage of which is in doubt.

Ryan's announcement came after emotional speeches from the floor by Democrats, who were joined by about two dozen immigrant children.

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas said the detaining of children separately from parents who have crossed the border illegally is child abuse. Rep. Luis Gutierrez of Illinois said he was heartened by the debate because he is seeing Americans "standing up for children, standing up for those who are in need."

As Gutierrez spoke, his microphone was cut off because lawmakers and children gathered around him as he spoke, which is considered a breach of decorum.

Trump was said to have given them little clarity on Tuesday at a meeting despite desiring an overall immigration fix in order to address the separation issue.

As Trump left the session at the Capitol, a half-dozen House Democrats confronted him and yelled, "Stop separating our families!"

Kirstjen Nielsen dining in Mexican restaurant is set upon by vocal group of people opposing the detention of migrant children 0:43

Nielsen, who vigorously defended the administration with reporters at the White House the previous day, was confronted by protesters as she ate dinner at a Mexican restaurant Tuesday night.

Criticism has even come from within the party over both the policy and the statements of Trump surrogates in its defence.

Veteran Republican strategist Steve Schmidt, who helped lead John McCain's presidential campaign in 2008, said he is renouncing his membership in the Republican Party, in light of the political tempest over the Trump administration immigration policy that separates children from their parents.

Schmidt's tweet came not long after many were horrified by the reaction of former Trump presidential campaign chair Corey Lewandowski in a Fox News segment on Tuesday night.

While another panellist recounted a story about a girl with Down syndrome affected by the policy, Lewandowski let out a derisive "Wah wah."

Condemnation abroad growing

Trump has made a habit of criticizing American allies Britain, Germany and Canada over perceived faults in their domestic policies, but the tables have turned on this issue.

British Prime Minister Theresa May criticized the U.S. policy after being challenged by a Labour MP on Wednesday.

"The pictures of children being held in what appear to be cages are deeply disturbing," said May. "This is wrong, this is not something we agree with, this is not the U.K.'s approach."

May did say a planned Trump visit to Britain was still on as it was important for the two nations to discuss a host of issues.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who declined an opportunity to criticize the America shift earlier this week, was emphatic in condemning the practice on Wednesday.

"What's going on in the United States is wrong," he said. "I can't imagine what the families living through this are enduring. Obviously, this is not the way we do things in Canada."

Asked Wednesday about reports of American officials separating migrant children from their parents, German government spokesperson Steffen Seibert said "in our opinion two things always belong together in migration policy: respecting the law, and respecting the dignity of every single human being."

Seibert did reject comparisons drawn by some U.S. critics between the policy and those of Nazi Germany. He told reporters: "Before anyone speaks of concentration camps they should recall what concentration camps in German history were; what unspeakable, criminal regime used them and what enormous suffering it caused to millions of people."

Conservative opposition

Some business leaders have condemned the policy, including the CEO's of Facebook, Google and Apple.

While opposition from Silicon Valley — perceived as largely liberal — was not overly surprising, several conservative business groups and think-tanks have also weighed in with a negative reaction.

Immigrants recently processed and released by U.S. Customs and Border Protection wait at the the Catholic Charities RGV on Wednesday in McAllen, Texas. (Eric Gay/Associated Press)

The Business Roundtable, which represents the CEOs of Walmart, General Motors, Boeing, JPMorgan Chase, Mastercard and others, urged an immediate end to the policy. So did the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which represents more than three million small and large businesses.

The Cato Institute, founded by billionaire Republican donors the Kochs, has said it is a disproportionate response that will not deter the migration northward from Central America, where often desperate circumstances are prompting people to leave.

Refraining from criticizing Trump were Christian organizations Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council. Asked to comment on the matter by U.S. media organizations, spokespeople focused on the illegal border

Senator John Cornyn from Texas told reporters that Democrats "are conflicted, because they like the narrative" of blaming Trump for separating families.

But he said Democrats "are going to be challenged to try to fix the problem, and if they don't appear to be willing to meet us halfway I think they're using this for partisan purposes will be exposed."

