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Editorial: Mark Pocan helps sell Trump falsehood

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President Donald Trump claims that critics of his cruel and ham-handed immigration policies are really just supporters of “open borders.”

The charge is absurd.

Democrats and many Republicans have supported legislation allowing illegal immigrants brought to the United States as children to stay here and earn citizenship over time. The same bipartisan proposal would spend billions of dollars to build barriers and hire additional patrol officers to better secure the border.

It’s also true that former Democratic President Barack Obama was “the most stringent enforcer of immigration laws in American history — far outstripping the deportation numbers of the George W. Bush and earlier administrations,” according to the conservative Cato Institute.

Despite all that, Trump continued to claim that Democrats stand for “open borders” this week as he traveled to Wisconsin. And he got some unexpected help from U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Black Earth.

Pocan on Monday proposed eliminating the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, which Republicans construed as meaning an end to immigration enforcement.

“Pocan hands Republicans a huge campaign issue to run on in November. #tonedeaf #theywantopenborders,” state Assembly Majority Leader Jim Steineke, R-Kaukauna, tweeted Monday.

Pocan recently visited U.S. detention camps along the nation’s southern border. In many cases, parents seeking asylum in America had been separated from their children under a harmful Trump administration policy that the president finally abandoned last week. Many families remain separated.

“I’m introducing legislation that would abolish ICE and crack down on the agency’s blanket directive to target and round up individuals and families,” Pocan announced Monday.

The Democrat said he’ll seek a commission to recommend “transferring necessary functions to other agencies.”

Pocan got national attention for his call to end ICE. But his proposal also fueled polarization just as Congress was trying to reach an immigration deal, which subsequently fell apart.

Pocan and the rest of Wisconsin's congressional delegation should seek a bipartisan agreement that respects the law and our borders yet allows more hard-working and desperate people a shot at the American dream.