



## **In Our View: Congress overdue to act on immigration policies**

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The Trump administration has once again highlighted the need for Congress to enact comprehensive changes to the nation's immigration policies.

In the meantime, the state of Washington is wise to join nearly 20 states in challenging the latest directive in court. The policy announced last week is, as state Attorney General Bob Ferguson says, "un-American, anti-immigrant and unlawful."

The administration has issued a rule that will make immigrants who use certain government safety-net programs — even those legally in this country — ineligible for permanent residency. The move would block a path to citizenship for immigrants who temporarily rely on Medicaid, food stamps, housing assistance or various other programs. Without intervention from the courts, the new rule is scheduled to take effect in October.

The decision is in line with an administration that believes it is wise policy to separate migrant children from their families and hold them in cages. And while it does not demonstrate the same level of cruelty, it further diminishes the United States' status as a beacon to the world.

Overall, the directive marks a radical departure on immigration policy. The administration has been trending in that direction, moving away from a focus on reuniting families to one based on English proficiency and work experience. There are valid arguments to support that change of focus, but the latest effort is a clumsy one that is poorly considered.

Whether for native-born Americans or relative newcomers, public assistance can provide an essential boost that is a profitable investment for the country. Despite frequent assertions from President Trump and a growing number of nationalists, the United States has benefited from a long history of welcoming people from a variety of countries and a variety of backgrounds.

Now, as ever, the United States is a nation of immigrants. Not only do they tend and gather crops, they tend to the sick and vulnerable. Census data have shown that 29 percent of doctors in the U.S. are foreign-born, some of them arriving as children, some for medical training, and others being trained overseas and then coming to the United States. Roughly 24 percent of dentists were born overseas, and 16 percent of registered nurses are immigrants. In a variety of jobs, immigrants add to the national mosaic.

In addition, the administration's efforts to paint immigrants — both legal and undocumented — as roving gangs of criminals do not hold up to scrutiny. As the libertarian Cato Institute summarizes, "All immigrants have a lower criminal incarceration rate and there are lower crime rates in the neighborhoods where they live, according to the near-unanimous findings of the peer-reviewed evidence."

If allowed to take effect, the new rule will demonstrate dismissiveness toward people who have followed the rules and entered this nation legally. Instead of welcoming the tired, poor and huddled masses yearning to breathe free, President Trump is signaling to the world that this no longer is the land of opportunity. It is, indeed, un-American.

Part of the climate that has led to such thinking is the result of a Congress that long has failed to deal with immigration. The president is correct to draw attention to immigration and to highlight those failings, although his manner is heavy-handed and leans toward incendiary rhetoric rather than solutions.

The courts should quickly quash Trump's latest immigration policy. But long-term solutions will depend on a Congress that thus far has abdicated its duty.