



Rep. Paul Gosar: Comprehensive immigration reform is a 'crap sandwich'

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Rep. Paul Gosar has dubbed long-standing bipartisan efforts to take a comprehensive approach toward overhauling the nation's immigration system a "crap sandwich."

During an appearance Wednesday on C-SPAN's "Washington Journal," the Arizona Republican said he favors tackling issues such as border security and illegal immigration piece by piece, breaking from more moderate Republicans who favor a broad approach toward immigration that combines border security and immigration enforcement with a legalization program for undocumented immigrants and upgrades to the legal immigration system.

"Immigration is a complex piece of legislation. It encumbers so many different pieces," said Gosar, a member of the House Freedom Caucus, a group of conservative and libertarian lawmakers. "You have to share each of these pieces. You have to take them one at a time. You can't just put a comprehensive bill forward because everybody knows in America, when you put comprehensive behind anything, there is crap. It's a crap sandwich."

Here are five other points Gosar made on the issue of immigration during the half-hour program.

The cost of illegal immigration

Gosar claimed that illegal immigration costs the nation \$100 billion annually.

Gosar didn't cite a source for that figure. His spokeswoman, Melissa Brown, did not immediately respond to an email request for the source of Gosar's statement.

The figure, however, seems implausibly high considering that is about the amount the United States spends on the departments of Education and Energy combined. It's also greater than the entire fortune of Warren Buffett, the world's second-richest man.

Gosar likely pulled the figure from a 2017 report by the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a group that advocates for less overall immigration, legal and illegal.

According to the report titled, "The Fiscal Burden of Illegal Aliens on U.S. Taxpayers," the net fiscal cost of immigrants in the country illegally was nearly \$116 billion. The figure was based on estimates that the local, state and federal expenditures on immigrants in the country illegally totaled nearly \$135 billion, while their total local, state and federal tax contributions totaled nearly \$19 billion for a net fiscal cost of nearly \$116 billion.

FAIR's figure, however, was debunked by a report by the Cato Institute, a libertarian group.

"FAIR's report reaches that conclusion by vastly overstating the costs of illegal immigration, undercounting the tax revenue they generate, inflating the number of illegal immigrants, counting millions of U.S. citizens as illegal immigrants, and by concocting a method of estimating the fiscal costs that is rejected by all economists who work on this subject," the Cato report said.

Cato's Alex Nowrasteh calculated the net fiscal cost of illegal immigration far lower, at between \$3.3 billion and \$15.6 billion.

Discharge petition

Gosar made clear he is unhappy with efforts by moderate Republicans to force a vote on immigration legislation, including addressing the legal status of the so-called Dreamers, the young undocumented immigrants who were brought to the country as children.

He said the uncommon tactic, known as a "discharge petition," reflects a lack of leadership by House Speaker Paul Ryan.

"Immigration is so important. This is the fabric of this country," Gosar said. "We can't do this behind closed doors. This has to be done publicly with the American public piece by piece by piece, and explain it, allow them to chime in because this is where their voice counts the most."

Gosar's comments came as 215 members of the House of Representatives have signed on to a Republican-led effort to force Ryan to hold floor votes on immigration-related bills. With broad support from House Democrats, the effort needs the signatures of three more members to bring the bills to the floor.

Such a maneuver would allow relatively moderate Republicans to vote for more accommodating immigration measures to fend off their Democratic challengers in this year's midterm elections. At the same time, the GOP's more conservative members would have a chance to show support for more restrictive legislation.

Democrats largely support the tactic, though it is unlikely to produce a bill that could pass the Senate.

Gosar suggested he is open to legislation that would allow a broader pool of undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children to legalize their immigration status, not just the 700,000 to 800,000 who have received temporary deportation protections through the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

Until he was blocked by the courts, President Donald Trump has tried to end in the DACA program, which former President Barack Obama created through executive action. Trump gave Congress until March 5 to come up with a permanent solution for addressing the legal status of Dreamers, but the deadline came and went without any action.

“Is there an ability to have these DACA, or these folks who came in as children, to stay here but not with citizenship? Maybe that’s where I’m at is that I don’t want to give a special denotation for these people.”

Gosar indicated that he opposes any legislation that would allow undocumented Dreamers to eventually get citizenship.

"I think everybody would like to try to help them," Gosar said, but "citizenship that is a big stretch."

Allowing undocumented immigrants to gain legal status without the opportunity to apply for citizenship would create a group of second-class citizens, critics say, common in some other countries, but potentially unprecedented in the United States.

But Gosar said allowing undocumented dreamers to gain full citizenship, instead of just legal status, would be unfair to those who have waited in line to come legally.

“Is there an ability to have these DACA, or these folks who came in as children, to stay here but not with citizenship?" Gosar added later. "Maybe that’s where I’m at is that I don’t want to give a special denotation for these people."

Border wall

When it comes to Trump's border wall, Gosar said he is one of those "stalwart" people who has brought "new solutions to the table."

His idea: Combine construction of a border wall with a water facility that reduces flooding in Santa Cruz County caused by rainwater flowing from higher elevations in Nogales, Sonora, into lower elevations in Nogales, Arizona, during heavy storms.

"So there’s a perfect opportunity to share a border facility with a water infrastructure aspect called the Lower Santa Cruz, where Mexico would pay their fair share, 50 percent, the United States 50 percent," Gosar said. "And you would actually have something that both sides want and need."

Gosar said he opposes a movement going on "behind closed doors" in Congress to remove E-Verify from the immigration debate, or allowing the agriculture industry to be exempted from using E-Verify, should it become mandatory.

E-Verify is the federal government's online system that allows employers to quickly check whether a potential employee is legally authorized to work in the U.S. Currently, it's voluntary at the federal level, although some states, including Arizona, have passed laws that require all or some businesses to use the system.

"That is one of the key contentions right now behind closed doors, is that that needs to go away, and if it stays it has to have an exemption for the agricultural business," Gosar said. "That's totally wrong because you got to have it across the board."

Gosar said he opposes exempting agriculture from a mandatory E-Verify system even though his district includes the Yuma area, an agricultural area where most of the nation's supply of winter greens are grown.

"I understand the agricultural application, but once again, everybody's got to follow the laws. No exemptions here," Gosar said.