



A bill to deal with DACA would halve legal immigration

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June 19, 2018

Ever since President Donald Trump set in motion the gradual termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which gave work permits to young immigrants brought here illegally when they were children, Congress has been stalled on solving the situation of these 700,000 so-called Dreamers.

After much Republican intraparty wrangling, Speaker Paul D. Ryan agreed to bring two bills to the floor of the House of Representatives.

He released a draft of one of those bills Thursday. The other has been kicking around Washington for a while: the Securing America's Future Act. The White House supported an earlier version of it, stating that it "would accomplish the president's core priorities for the American people." The problem is that even if the SAF Act doesn't pass — and let's hope it doesn't — its draconian cuts to immigration will be the Republican starting point for all future negotiations.

The primary outrage is this: SAF won't give Dreamers green cards. Instead it grants renewable residency permits — with no pathway to citizenship — to some DACA recipients. Worse, the restrictions are so onerous that few Dreamers could ever spend a year as a stay-at-home mother, risk starting a small business or even become a priest. That's because this bill would make it a crime for anyone holding a SAF permit to have an income below 125 percent of poverty level.

The House sponsors of the SAF Act claim it will cut only about a quarter of all green cards, but they are significantly understating its effect.

SAF cuts the number of legal immigrants by about 40 percent initially, and that number could reach 50 percent over 10 years. It cancels the diversity green card lottery, eliminates all family-sponsored immigration categories except for the most immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, and cuts to the bone the number of asylum seekers who will be admitted.

The SAF Act also purports to increase the number of highly skilled immigrants allowed into the U.S., and allocates 55,000 additional green cards toward that. But of adults who immigrated on a family or diversity visa in 2015, 47 percent had a college degree. The impact of any cuts to those programs will far outweigh the added employment visas.

This bill also poses major trouble for the families of legal immigrants. Under SAF, legal immigrants who already have a green card would be mostly unable to bring their foreign-born spouses or children to the U.S. Additionally, immigrants who have waited for decades for a type of green card that would be eliminated by the SAF bill would suddenly have their applications canceled and their fees confiscated.

So much for respecting immigrants who played by the rules.

Republicans have for years claimed that they oppose only illegal immigration, and President Trump, as a candidate said he wanted immigrants “to come in, but they’ve got to come in like you: legally.” The SAF’s sponsors are clearly not on the same page.

It’s misleading to even call the SAF Act an immigration bill. As a matter of rhetoric, it’s an anti-immigration piece of legislation. If a Democratic politician sponsored a bill to cut legal gun ownership by 40 percent, Republicans would rightly call it an anti-gun bill. The same rules ought to apply here.

In addition, even though the number of illegal border crossings is at a 46-year low, the bill would spend about \$124 billion over the next five years on border security. That’s about seven times what it cost to fund the Border Patrol for the five years from 2012 to 2017.

Congress hasn’t considered an immigration bill this bad since the 1920s, when it passed the Emergency Quota Act in 1921 and the National Origins Act in 1924. Those laws ended most immigration from Europe, slashing it by about 75 percent. The Great Depression followed soon after, leading to further tightening of immigration laws.

Those shameful bills ended the United States’ traditional role as a refuge for the oppressed peoples of the world just as communism, fascism and Nazism began to rise in Europe. And their effect endured. It wasn’t until this century that the number of new green cards issued annually consistently matched the decade before World War I — about 1 million a year.

Even if that sorry history doesn’t repeat itself, the SAF Act is still the worst immigration bill introduced in almost a century. Republican hardliners say it’s a compromise — helping out Dreamers in return for more border security. It’s not. It’s a strategy for deporting Dreamers over a longer period of time while cutting legal immigration in half, canceling the applications of those who have patiently waited for a green card, and wasting \$124 billion.

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