

# Could Trump's Illegal Plan to Ship Migrants to 'Sanctuary Cities' Make Everyone Happy?



Whether it's legal or not, Trump wants to transport detained migrants far from his electoral base. Photo: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

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The Washington *Post* created a major buzz in political circles Thursday night

when it reported the Trump administration had been kicking around the idea of transporting and releasing migrants detained at the border in districts represented in Congress by their Democratic “enemies,” or in cities that have “sanctuary” policies limiting cooperation with federal immigration enforcement efforts (Nancy Pelosi’s San Francisco, of course, qualifies under either approach).

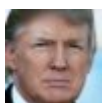
Every administration official the *Post* talked to denied that any such plan was under active consideration, despite its apparent strong support from presidential adviser Stephen Miller, thought to be a bigger dog than ever after a recent purge of DHS. For one thing, federal immigration attorneys could find no discernible legal authority for taking such a step, particularly since federal judges tend to frown on using executive authority visibly to “punish” political enemies, which was clearly a major rationale for the proposal.

But just when the idea was thought to be one of those scary potential Trump administration policies that cooler heads would sidetrack, you-know-who gave it fresh momentum:



*Donald J. Trump@realDonaldTrump*

*Due to the fact that Democrats are unwilling to change our very dangerous immigration laws, we are indeed, as reported, giving strong considerations to placing Illegal Immigrants in Sanctuary Cities only....*



*Donald J. Trump@realDonaldTrump*

*....The Radical Left always seems to have an Open Borders, Open Arms policy – so this should make them very happy!*

As my colleague Jonathan Chait observed, the migrants-to-the-cities idea reflects a general radicalization of the administration’s challenge to legal and political norms:

*There is little mystery about Trump’s intent to turn [DHS] into an unalloyed instrument of his agenda. So we are left wondering whether the danger has*

*been thwarted, or whether it yet looms over our heads.*

A related question is whether Trump's tweets on the subject are just an act of trolling designed to put Democrats in a bad spot, or something that appeals to his (and Miller's) crude but sometimes shrewd political instincts.

Once you think about it for a while, the migrants-to-the-cities policy does make sense from the perspective of xenophobic MAGA supporters living far from New York or Chicago or San Francisco, who count on Trump to protect them from the swarthy invaders that represent an existential threat to everything they cherish. The idea of "owning the libs" by exposing them directly and exclusively to the consequences of their unpatriotic policies makes it an even more emotionally satisfying proposition among angry conservatives. The underlying message to the president's enemies is: *You want these garbage people in our country? Then you take 'em in your neighborhoods and streets and schools!*

But there's another side of the political coin on this subject: Though he meant it as a taunt, Trump may *actually be right* that accepting migrant families into their communities would make a lot of urban liberals happy. Despite the lurid picture of migrants Trump's allies like to paint, these are hardly hardened "criminals." Most immigrants with serious criminal records aren't released anywhere other than back across the border. They do represent a fresh source of inexpensive labor at a time when labor markets have become very tight. For people in cities that don't fear them, migrants could represent an important new economic resource, particularly for places where construction is booming, as the *New York Times* notes:

*"The recent shortage of immigrant workers is impacting housing and housing affordability," said Jerry Howard, chief executive of the National Association of Home Builders. Phil Crone, who runs the association's Dallas chapter, said the labor bottleneck was adding about \$6,000 to the cost of every home built in the area and delaying completion by two months.*

*Were it not for immigrants, the labor crunch would be even more intense. In 2016, immigrants accounted for one in four construction workers, according to a study by Natalia Siniavskaia of the home builders' association, up from about one in five in 2004. In some of the least-skilled jobs — like plastering, roofing and hanging drywall, for which workers rarely have more than a high school*

*education — the share of immigrants hovers around half.*

As Splinter's Libby Watson points out, dumping migrants *anywhere* without appropriate support would be horridly inhumane — not to the host communities, but to migrants themselves:

*The release of these migrants to the streets without any support, of course, is vile in itself. On Christmas Day last year (gotta love this administration's Christian charity), NPR **reported** that ICE had released "approximately 400 migrants near the Greyhound bus terminal with no apparent plan in place for the men, women and children" over the past few days. Those migrants were left "completely reliant on generous strangers who have been showing up in droves to distribute food, water and blankets as temperatures drop into the 40s."*

But Watson goes on to suggest that the "own the libs" rationale for such a policy doesn't hold up:

*A premise like "busing migrants to San Francisco will punish Nancy Pelosi" is not self-explanatory. I do not immediately understand the mechanism by which releasing a tired, huddled mass of immigrants in cities with massive populations — and cities where asylum approval rates are much higher — punish their representatives.*

So while it's almost certainly not going to happen, for all sorts of reasons (including the law), it's worth noting that the administration's assumption that people everywhere would freak out at having to deal with relatively small numbers of resettled migrants could be dead wrong. That doesn't mean we can just happily move to a country where polarized attitudes on immigration and other subjects can be accommodated by two sets of policies that together please most of the people most of the time. But it may show that the myth of hypocritical lefties who are bigoted as everyone else is just that.

Perhaps it could even become a popular slogan: Dear Migrants: Welcome to New York City!

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Source:

<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/04/could-trump-sending-migrants-to-cities-make-everybody-happy.html>

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