

Trump team unveils new immigration framework with path to citizenship for DREAMers

WASHINGTON — A White House proposal on immigration will contain a path to citizenship for up to 1.8 million young people brought into the United States as children as part of a package that also includes \$25 billion for a border wall and other security measures.

President Trump's plan would also include a massive cut in family-based immigration and the end to a diversity visa lottery system that gives preference to immigrants from under-represented countries, according to a White House briefing for congressional staffers and Trump allies hosted by White House senior adviser Stephen Miller.

The proposal is designed to win 60 Senate votes and break a potential filibuster that could trigger another government shutdown next month, Miller said on the call, to which USA TODAY obtained access.

The path to citizenship has been among the most contentious issues in the immigration debate over the last decade, and Trump himself has taken inconsistent positions on it. But in an impromptu group interview with reporters Wednesday, the president said he's willing to consider citizenship for so-called DREAMers who came to the United States as children.

"If they do a great job, I think it's a nice thing to have the incentive of, after a period of years, being able to become a citizen," Trump said. That period would be 10 to 12 years, Trump said.

Yet the proposal to cut back family-based immigration is sure to draw fire from Democrats, as it represents a nearly 25% cut to legal immigration into the country. Under the new plan, Miller said that U.S. citizens and green card holders will only be allowed to sponsor their spouses and minor children to enter the country.

Congress passed a short-term funding bill over the weekend to keep the

government open until Feb. 8; Democrats have insisted the Senate take up an immigration bill before voting on any additional funding. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said in a statement Thursday that he appreciated Trump laying out his immigration objectives. "I am hopeful that as discussions continue in the Senate on the subject of immigration, Members on both sides of the aisle will look to this framework for guidance as they work towards an agreement," he said.

The plan addresses four issues that the White House has insisted be included in any immigration fix:

► **DREAMers.** The bill would provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children, known as DREAMers. The number of immigrants who could qualify would be larger than the group protected under the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. That program covered nearly 800,000 DREAMers, but Miller said the new plan could protect up to 1.8 million people, which is "substantially larger than the DACA population."

The immigrants who would be eligible to apply for citizenship may face a process that could take 10 to 12 years, according to Trump. "We're going to morph into it," Trump told reporters. "I think it's a nice thing to have the incentive of, after a period of years, being able to become a citizen."

Eligibility criteria would include requirements for "work, education and good moral character," according to a White House summary of the plan.

That plan mirrors a bipartisan Senate proposal that would allow DREAMers to become citizens after 12 years, or 10 years if they were approved for DACA.

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► **Border security.** The White House has proposed a \$25 billion "trust fund" to build at least parts of a wall along the United States-Mexico border. That represents a sharp increase from the \$18 billion that the Department of Homeland Security requested in recent weeks, but also includes improvements to ports of entry on the Canadian border as well.

While the wall has been a sticking point for congressional Democrats, Trump said Wednesday: "If you don't have a wall, you don't have DACA."

The border wall could be a contentious issue among Democrats. In negotiations over a spending bill to keep the government open last week, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York told Trump he would be willing to appropriate money for a border wall in exchange for protections for DREAMers, but was turned down. The government shut down early Saturday morning and did not reopen until Monday.

After a weekend of blaming each other for the breakdown in negotiations, Schumer rescinded his offer to fund the wall – and it is not clear, at this point, that Democrats would be willing to put it back on the table.

► **Family-based migration:** The White House plan would restrict the practice of sponsoring relatives for green cards to “nuclear families,” namely spouses and minor children. That practice, dubbed “chain migration” by Trump and other critics, has long been the main source of immigration into the U.S.

According to an analysis of Department of Homeland Security data, the proposed cut would eliminate nearly a quarter of the roughly 1 million immigrants allowed to enter the U.S. each year.

In 2016, the U.S. government granted lawful permanent residence known as green cards to 1.2 million foreigners. More than 260,000 green cards – 23% – were granted to parents, adult children, siblings, grandchildren, nieces and nephews of U.S. citizens and green card holders.

More: What is ‘chain migration’ and why does President Trump want to end it?

► **Visa lottery.** Created by Congress in 1990, the diversity visa lottery grants 50,000 visas a year to people from countries under-represented in the U.S. In recent years, most have come from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe.

The White House plan would devote those slots to fill in the family-based and high-skilled visa backlog. After those slots are filled, the visa lottery would end completely, Miller said.

Like McConnell, many Republicans in Congress applauded Trump for putting forward a proposal without actually endorsing all the elements of the plan. Democratic leaders did not immediately respond, but some lawmakers saw immediate flaws in Trump’s plan. Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, said in a tweet

“There is no public policy justification for cutting legal immigration in half. None.”

And liberal icon Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., called the plan “insulting” and an “anti-immigrant wish list.”

Some conservatives were equally skeptical of what they called an expansion of “amnesty” for immigrants now in the country illegally. “Amnesty comes in many forms, but it seems they all eventually grow in size and scope, said Michael Needham, CEO of the conservative political group Heritage Action for America. “Any proposal that expands the amnesty-eligible population risks opening pandora’s box, and . . . should be a non-starter.”

Contributing: Alan Gomez reported from Miami

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