

RUBIO REFRAMES HIS DREAM ACT REVISION

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Highlight: It's not an alternative on immigration policy, he says, it's more of a humanitarian issue.

Body

U.S. Sen Marco **Rubio** sought Thursday to **reframe** his proposal to give legal status to children of illegal immigrants as a "humanitarian" concern rather than part of the contentious immigration debate.

The rhetorical shift comes while his plan continues to face skepticism from Democrats and as sharper objections are bubbling up in conservative circles.

"There are concerns by many people in my own party that we need to do enforcement first before we do anything on immigration. Those are valid concerns," the Florida Republican said. "But I would just say this is really not an immigration issue; it's a humanitarian issue.

"We do have hundreds of thousands of young people in this country that entered without any fault of their own and if we have a chance to allow them to get right what their parents got wrong, and if we can do it in a way that doesn't encourage illegal immigration in the future, we should consider that."

Rubio's proposal is an alternative to the **Dream Act**, which would provide a path to citizenship and has widespread support among Democrats and undocumented youths. Many Republicans consider that amnesty, **Rubio** included. His plan would instead grant nonimmigrant visas but the youths would have to go through the process of becoming permanent residents.

Appearing at a Washington hotel before a business group from Iowa, **Rubio** stressed the limited scope of his plan and that he preferred dealing with immigration "sequentially."

Casting it as humanitarian - he likened it to the special status afforded to "Cuban refugees" - is a newer approach that seems to indicate the difficulty **Rubio** is facing in pitching his plan, which has still not been officially released. His office said it was not a strategic shift and that it reflects his feelings.

The GOP is trying to seek a more moderate stance on immigration as the Hispanic population grows and the problem at the border subsides. But **Rubio's** plan has come under fire from the right. Anti-immigration groups have mobilized to call his office in opposition and urge other Republicans against it.

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On Tuesday, a group of GOP House members joined with the Federation for American Immigration Reform and conservative radio hosts in an effort to caution the party not to back down on illegal immigration.

"**Rubio** needs to wake up, or those who follow him are going to fall off a cliff," FAIR spokesman Bob Dane said, according to Congressional Quarterly.

Rubio's comments came at the end of a wide-ranging speech before the Greater Des Moines Partnership. Iowa, of course, holds the nation's first presidential nominating contest and **Rubio**'s appearance elicited a number of nodding winks to his political ambitions.

His speech focused on American exceptionalism and drew sustained applause.

"They'd love him in Iowa," said John Viars, a Democrat from Des Moines. "He's got all the right beats, he knows exactly how to play his audience. He was so carefully negotiating his response to the immigration question. I think that's the key - these kids are human beings."

Graphic

PHOTO: Sen. Marco **Rubio** made the assertions in a speech in Washington.

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