

Stop telling immigrants to wait in line and tell Congress to fix immigration

The Daily Campus: University of Connecticut

October 17, 2019 Thursday

University Wire

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Section: OPINION; Pg. 1

Length: 705 words

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Body

In this Oct. 10, 2019 file photo, President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at the Target Center in Minneapolis. Republicans and Democrats don't agree on health care, immigration or taxing the rich. But one subject draws critics from both parties: Big Tech. Trump has been uneven in his criticisms. Photo courtesy of AP Photo/Evan Vucci, File. Thumbnail photo courtesy of AP Photo/Brynn Anderson.

Discourse around the issue of immigration often shows how little Americans know about the immigration system. For example, many Americans (including President Trump) strongly believe that undocumented immigrants have no right to be in the United States because they did not "wait in line." However, this view does not take into account that for most prospective immigrants there is no line to join, and the existing lines have waiting times that range from a few months to decades. Instead of telling the rest of the world to wait in line, Americans should tell Congress to pass legislation to overhaul the immigration system.

Even though the United States grants green cards to around 1 million people each year, it is far from having an efficient immigration system. This is mainly due to the limits that Congress places on how many people can receive a green card under certain categories and understaffed immigration courts. In any given year, there are more applicants than there are green cards available or staff to process their applications, which leads to backlogs. Moreover, this system of processing immigrants has been unable to handle its growing backlog of cases in the past decade due to government shutdowns and an increase in immigrants from Central America at the southern border. According to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse , the immigration backlog has now surpassed 1 million cases.

Consider a Honduran immigrant fleeing gang violence who decides to migrate to the United States. There are only four options: apply for asylum, apply for refugee status, marry an American citizen, or get sponsored by a family member who is an American citizen. There is no category in the current system to provide a legal pathway for immigrants fleeing gang violence in Central America, which has forced hundreds of thousands of them to migrate illegally.

Those who do try to obtain asylum or refugee status are increasingly facing restrictive asylum policies under the Trump administration that seek to reduce the number of green cards granted to asylum-seekers.

This is contradictory to what the United States needs to do in order to mitigate its case backlog and shorten wait times. Rather than creating more lines so prospective migrants have options to come to the United States legally and in a timely manner, the Trump administration is attempting to reduce the number of lines, which will only increase wait times and illegal immigration.

Given that the immigration system is not in favor of an immigrant who would like to apply for a green card to relocate to the United States, the attitude that immigrants should wait in line is out of touch with reality. It is

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therefore not surprising that people have so little faith in the immigration system that they are willing to pay smugglers thousands of dollars and risk their lives to come here. This exemplifies a lack of trust in the government's ability to regulate immigration. Specifically, the lack of trust in Congress to mitigate the perennial backlogs of the immigration system through legislation.

The Trump administration will continue to make wait lines for immigration cases longer if it continues enacting restrictive immigration policies. Ironically, these efforts will not mitigate the issues that the immigration system faces, but rather exacerbate them. It is therefore Congress' responsibility to pass legislation to fix the immigration system, because it is the only entity that has the power to modify the system. When Americans tell immigrants to wait in line, they are shifting Congress' responsibility to fix immigration on an entity that has no power on this issue. It is time that Americans stop telling immigrants to wait in line and start telling Congress to fix the immigration system by passing legislation.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: IMMIGRATION (92%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2020 (90%); POLITICAL ASYLUM (89%); REFUGEES (89%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (88%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (78%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (75%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2012 (75%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2016 (75%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (74%); IMMIGRATION REGULATION & POLICY (74%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (73%); MIGRATION ISSUES (69%); LEGISLATION (64%)

Person: DONALD TRUMP (91%)

Geographic: MINNEAPOLIS, MN, USA (79%); CONNECTICUT, USA (79%); MINNESOTA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (96%); CENTRAL AMERICA (90%); HONDURAS (79%); Storrs, CT

Load-Date: October 17, 2019