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Trump, Democrats seek anti-immigrant deal

President Trump’s temporary postponement of mass deportation raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents—originally set to begin Sunday—has been hailed as a victory by congressional Democrats. But the two-week delay is intended, as Trump declared in a tweet, to enlist the Democrats as his partners in the ongoing repression of undocumented immigrants.

Trump tweeted: “At the request of Democrats, I have delayed the Illegal Immigration Removal Process (Deportation) for two weeks to see if the Democrats and Republicans can get together and work out a solution to the Asylum and Loophole problems at the Southern Border. If not, Deportations start!”

Trump was referring to broad changes in the legal framework governing requests for asylum by refugees fleeing violence, repression and poverty in the Central American countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, who account for the overwhelming majority of the families attempting to cross the US-Mexico border in recent months.

The White House wants an effective repeal of the right to asylum, which would be a flagrant violation of international law, as well as the removal of restraints on the detention of families such as the Flores settlement, a 20-year-old court ruling under which immigration authorities are forbidden to detain children for more than 20 days, in many cases forcing them to release the entire family.

While such legal changes will take longer than two weeks, the Democrats and Republicans are working on a more immediate deal on the Trump administration's request for another \$4.5 billion to handle the influx of refugee families over the past six months.

On Friday night, hours before Trump's tweet, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi telephoned the White House and spoke with Trump for 12 minutes about the impending raids. It is clear that she conveyed to him likely Democratic support for the additional funding. The Democratic leadership introduced a 27-page bill providing the \$4.5 billion on Friday and scheduled a vote on the House floor on Tuesday—extraordinarily rapid action on such a major piece of legislation.



Donald Trump with Nancy Pelosi, Credit: Wikimedia

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved a bill last week providing \$4.6 billion by a near-unanimous bipartisan vote of 30 to 1. The bill provides \$2.88 billion for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which has the responsibility for all minor children detained by the immigration authorities, except those held in temporary custody at the border.

Another \$1 billion goes to Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and more than \$200 million to ICE, with the balance to pay for Department of Defense operations in the border area.

Senator Patrick Leahy, the senior Democrat on the committee, called it a “compromise” that meant “no one is going to walk away with everything they wanted.” Senator Richard Durbin, the minority whip, also voted for the bill in committee.

According to a report in the *Washington Post* Sunday, Durbin and Republican Senator Lindsay Graham, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, “are discussing potential changes

to asylum laws that, paired with the additional funding, could help address the situation at the border.”

The lone Democrat to oppose the bill, Jeff Merkley of Oregon, objected to the bill’s failure to effectively bar HHS from sharing information with ICE about families that agree to sponsor an immigrant child. These families—frequently themselves undocumented—have been subjected to arrest and detention by ICE when they offered to take in children, in many cases relatives or people from the same villages in their home countries.

There are numerous differences between the House and Senate bill, most of them falling into the category of cosmetic efforts by the Democrats to disguise the fundamentally repressive character of the border regime they are agreeing to finance. (The House bill, for example, includes no Pentagon money, and less for ICE than the Senate bill).

But the direction is unmistakable. Whether on Trump’s two-week timetable or over a somewhat longer period, the congressional Democratic leadership has decided, as the *New York Times* urged in an editorial last month, to “Give Trump His Border Money.”

There is little doubt that Pelosi told Trump that the mass raids and scenes of violent attacks on immigrant families, screaming children and devastated homes and communities would make it politically difficult for the Democrats to rubber-stamp his demand for funding the border regime.

There were reportedly also concerns that ICE was not prepared to carry out the raids, particularly under conditions where Trump’s announcement that “millions” were about to be deported—timed to give a boost to his rally last Tuesday kicking off his re-election campaign—had alarmed immigrant communities throughout the country.

There was every possibility of community resistance and even violence as the raids unfolded, particularly in major cities where local police forces had indicated they would not be participating in the roundups, including Los Angeles, San Jose, San Francisco, Chicago, Baltimore and New York City, to name just a few.

The impact of the raids was likely to be even more disruptive because, as a number of press accounts explained, ICE agents would be going to the “last known address” of immigrants facing final orders of deportation, even if those addresses were years old and likely out of date. ICE would arrest everyone at the targeted addresses, even if they were not the immigrants they were seeking, in the expectation that they would also likely be undocumented and thus subject to arrest and detention.

The *Washington Post* wrote, “White House and ICE officials believe agents will be able to make many ‘collateral arrests’ by finding foreigners living in the country illegally at or near the target locations.”

The vicious mentality behind the planned raids was expressed by the acting head of ICE Mark Morgan, a former Obama administration official recently brought back to spearhead Trump’s war on immigrants. Throughout June, Morgan has been calling for an explicit targeting of families in ICE arrests and detentions. “The message has gotten out that if you bring a kid, nothing will ever happen to you,” he told the press. “We need to make sure we’re sending the message that that will not be tolerated any more.”

The alignment of the Democratic Party with Trump’s anti-immigrant campaign was demonstrated by the response of leading Democrats to the statements of Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who last week condemned the conditions in ICE and CBP detention facilities, saying, “This administration has established concentration camps on the southern border of the United States for immigrants, where they are being brutalized with dehumanizing conditions and dying.”

Ocasio-Cortez was immediately assailed by the usual run of fascistic Republicans and Fox News talking heads, including Representative Liz Cheney—daughter of the former vice president and unindicted war criminal—as well as Zionist spokesmen, who claimed, falsely, that she was demeaning the memory of the Holocaust.

The media took up the same theme. Chuck Todd of NBC News pontificated, “If you want to criticize the shameful treatment of people at our southern border, fine, you’ll have plenty of company. But be careful comparing them to Nazi concentration camps. Because they’re not at all comparable. In the slightest.”

This smear campaign was also taken up by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination. “You cannot compare,” he said. “What the Nazis did in the concentration camps unfortunately is without any historical [parallel]. It’s a horrible moment. There’s no way to compare it.”

Ocasio-Cortez did not call the US detention facilities “death camps,” as she explained, but used the term “concentration camp” in its broader historical context: the barbaric measure was introduced more than a century ago in wars by Spain in Cuba, Britain against the Boers in South Africa, and the United States in the Philippines.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines “concentration camp” as “A camp where persons are confined, usually without hearings and typically under harsh conditions, often as a result of their membership in a group the government has identified as dangerous or undesirable.”

The Democratic Party is now engaged in negotiations with the Trump administration on exactly how and on what terms such facilities will be maintained and operated on a mass scale in the United States.

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