

Plan to halt legal immigration prompts opposition in state

BY JESSE LEAVENWORTH

President Donald Trump's announcement that he will halt some legal immigration to protect American jobs prompted Connecticut's congressional delegation and immigration advocates to charge Trump with using the coronavirus pandemic to advance anti-immigrant policies.

On Tuesday evening, Trump announced he would sign an executive order for a "pause" of at least 60 days in immigration into the U.S. The order will apply only to those seeking permanent residency, not guest worker programs, Trump said.

Members of Connecticut's congressional delegation blasted the president's announcement.

"Yet again impulsive demagoguery not real policy-making," U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal tweeted. "Trump's racism & xenophobia will not stop COVID-19 nor hide his complete mishandling of this deadly virus. I'll continue to fight for our immigrant communities & against Trump's hateful agenda."

Immigration advocates said the president is promoting fear and a ban that would further endanger people seeking asylum in the U.S.

"The COVID-19 pandemic should not be used as a veil for xenophobia," Ashley Gaudino, spokeswoman for the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants, said Tuesday.

"Immigrants, including many of our clients throughout Connecticut, are leading during this crisis — as health care workers, scientists and researchers in cleaning up

Gaudino said. "It is immigrants who are providing so many of our essential services to ensure the safety and well-being of the people in our state."

But the Trump administration said the order protects American workers and does not include immigrant workers in essential areas, such as farming. The New York Times reported Tuesday the decision not to block guest worker programs was "a concession to business groups that assailed the White House on Tuesday."

Trump had tweeted his intentions Monday night.

"In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens," he tweeted, "I will be signing an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United States!"

"President Trump is committed to protecting the health and economic well-being of American citizens as we face unprecedented times," White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany said. "As President Trump has said, 'Decades of record immigration have produced lower wages and higher unemployment for our citizens, especially for African-American and Latino workers.' At a time when Americans are looking to get back to work, action is necessary."

Trump has said his restrictions on travel to the U.S. from China and hard-hit European countries have slowed the spread of the coronavirus in the U.S. But he has yet to extend those restrictions to other nations now experiencing virus outbreaks. Also, due to the pandemic, almost all visa processing by the State Department, including immigrant visas, has

U.S. Rep. John Larson said Trump's order "does not make a lot of sense."

"We've come to regard the President's tweets with skepticism, as his mind can change in the next 24-48 hours," Larson said. "However, on face value this order does not make a lot of sense. Stopping immigration will not stop the spread of COVID-19. The virus is already here. This move would only stand to leave asylum seekers in danger."

U.S. Sen Chris Murphy said that instead of leading an effective response to the pandemic, Trump "is just flailing around wildly trying to find someone else to blame."

"First it was China, then it was the World Health Organization, and now he has turned his ire on immigrants," Murphy said. "Let's be clear — we don't have a shortage of PPE, ventilators, or testing because of immigrants. We are in the position we're in today because this administration didn't take this crisis seriously."

Immigration advocates say Trump is using the pandemic as cover to advance his administration's hard-line policies. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) called Trump's tweet "merely his latest attempt to transform anti-immigrant bigotry into xenophobic government policy."

"Is the pandemic suddenly an excuse for using executive orders to bypass due process and separation of powers to govern by fiat?" Franciscan Action Network (FAN) Executive Director Stephen Schneck said Tuesday.

An Associated Press report was included in this story

Jesse Leavenworth can be