

Immigration opens ideological fault lines for 2020 Democrats

BY WILL WEISSERT
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Bernie Sanders is adding his support to a call by some of his fellow presidential hopefuls for decriminalizing illegal border crossings, a proposal that's further exposing deep ideological divides in the Democratic primary and may prove politically treacherous for the party in the general election.

The Vermont senator released a detailed immigration policy proposal on Thursday, writing, "Unauthorized presence in the United States is a civil, not a criminal, offense." He vowed to repeal existing statutes that put "border crossings on par with other forms of immigration violations, such as overstaying a visa."

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren called in July for repealing the criminal prohibition against crossing the border illegally, promising in her own immigration plan to "immediately issue guidance to end criminal prosecutions for simple administrative immigration violations." South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg has suggested he'd support making illegal border crossings civil offenses, but not in cases in which "fraud is involved," a potentially key caveat. Former Vice President Joe Biden also hasn't fully backed decriminalization of illegal border crossings, saying during a July presidential debate, "If you cross the border illegally, you should be able to be sent back. It's a crime."

The issue illustrates another important fault line between relative moderates like Biden and Buttigieg and those White House candidates willing to openly embrace progressive values like Sanders and Warren. Still, grappling with full decriminalization



KEREM YUCEL/GETTY-AFF

Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders supports decriminalizing crossing the U.S. border.

could be a tough sell for Democrats after the primary when their nominee will face voters who may disagree with President Donald Trump's hard-line U.S.-Mexico border policies — he leads cheers of "Finish the wall!" at his rallies — but worry about moving too far in the other direction.

"The problem with decriminalizing undocumented crossings is it fulfills the Republican narrative that Democrats want open borders, and that will be an absolute killer for us in November," said Colin Strother, a Texas Democratic strategist who lived for years along the Rio Grande.

In Thursday's plan, Sanders also promised to use executive orders to halt construction of the U.S.-Mexico border wall, put a moratorium on all deportations until current federal policy can be audited and allow people seeking U.S. asylum to remain in the country while their claims are processed rather than being sent to Mexico or elsewhere. And he vowed to break up the Department of Homeland Security.

Sanders said he was taking back an issue that should be about humanitarianism and not be viewed through the national security prism it

often has been since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks — nor used to stoke racist fears for political gain like he said Trump has done. His advisers shrugged off concerns that decriminalizing illegal border crossings may make their campaign, or those of other Democrats, seem soft on immigration.

Even as Trump, who has denied being racist, makes immigration a centerpiece of his reelection strategy, however, it has largely been overshadowed in the Democratic primary by other issues such as universal health coverage under "Medicare for All." It was most championed by two White House hopefuls from Texas, one of whom has already dropped out of the race and another who may do so soon.

In April, former Obama Housing Secretary Julian Castro became the first Democratic presidential hopeful to release a comprehensive immigration plan and to support making crossing the border illegally a civil rather than criminal offense. But Castro is winding down his presence in the key early state of New Hampshire and isn't likely to qualify for the debate later this month in Georgia, raising questions about how much longer he can continue.

Reenactment to honor largest slave rebellion in US history

BY REBECCA SANTANA
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Against the modern backdrop of oil refineries, strip malls and gated communities, hundreds of reenactors will gather Friday in southeastern Louisiana to remember a time when slavery flourished as a blight on America and some enslaved people fought back.

They plan to reenact the largest slave rebellion in American history.

Dressed in period costumes and holding machetes or rifles they will march 26 miles over two days from the sugar plantation country along the Mississippi River to the New Orleans suburbs.

"I think it will be an amazing experience," said artist Dread Scott, who conceived of the project, and whose works address racial injustice and oppression.

"Seeing hundreds of black folk with machetes and muskets and sickles and sabers, flags flying, chanting to traditional African drumming, is going to be an amazing moment. And people would be like, 'What am I looking at? This doesn't make sense,' he said. "It will be an area where people can learn a lot and think a lot."

Reenactments have been a staple of Civil War heritage in the South, where people don Confederate and Union uniforms and stage mock battles. But this effort seeks to illustrate the struggle over slavery that came to be the heart of that war.

Scott first envisioned it about eight years ago. He'd wanted to stage a slave rebellion reenactment — maybe Nat Turner's 1831 uprising in Virginia — but then a colleague told him about the uprising in Louisiana.

Slaves across a stretch of



GERALD HERBERT/AP PHOTOS

Patricia Gorman fits Louis Ward in a period costume Oct. 23 for Friday's reenactment march in south Louisiana.



Artist Dread Scott had the idea about eight years ago.

plantations organized for months before launching their rebellion on Jan. 8, 1811. Over two days the group grew to an estimated 200 to 500 people, according to Daniel Rasmussen's book "American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt."

Their goal was to march on New Orleans and establish a free republic. The rebellion was inspired in part by the Haitian revolution but conceived by people born in Louisiana and Africa, said Dr. Ibrahim Seck, the director of research at the Whitney Plantation and a historical adviser to the reenactment.

Most were field hands who toiled in hot, wet and humid conditions that contributed to their 13% yearly death rate, he said.

Scott said the project sprung from his interest in how people liberate themselves and in slavery's continuing effects on America today. He was also intrigued to learn about the little-known rebellion's goals and how close it came

to success.

"You can't actually understand American society if you don't understand slavery, and you can't understand slavery if you don't understand slave revolts," he said.

The reenactment comes at a time of heightened racial tension in the United States, following the election of President Donald Trump in 2016.

One of the most contentious episodes came in August 2017 when hundreds of white nationalists descended on Charlottesville, Virginia, to protest the planned removal of a Confederate statue. One person was killed when a white nationalist plowed his car into a crowd of counter-protesters.

Bob Snead, who heads the arts group Antenna that's producing the rebellion reenactment with Scott, said that was a key turning point. Some questioned whether the reenactment should even go on, but Snead said there was also a strong feeling that the project was more important than ever.

Organizers have taken precautions. They'll have law enforcement and private security, and reenactors are advised not to engage with anyone along the route who might harass them.

An Open Letter to SSA Commissioner Andrew Saul

Dear Commissioner Saul,

We are the employees who serve 63 million Social Security recipients every day in 1,200 field offices, teleservice centers, payment service centers, hearing offices, regional offices, and at headquarters in Baltimore. We are average Americans, called to serve our fellow citizens and provide key resources to America's most vulnerable populations. Yet recent actions, under your leadership, have made it clear that the Social Security Administration is not invested in its employees. As a result, our work will suffer.

The Trump administration has only sought to vilify the federal workforce and prevent us from doing the people's work. Our colleagues in other agencies face abrupt relocation across the country, see their research attacked, and lose employee rights on a daily basis. At SSA, you leveraged hostile executive orders to force our union to accept an unfair employee contract. Last week, SSA revoked telework, a successful policy dating back to 2013. This abrupt action forced 12,000 employees to scramble for childcare and elder care, driving down their productivity and increasing stress.

Telework, which has been widely adopted in the private sector, is proven to increase employee recruitment and retention, as well as efficiency. Thousands of SSA employees reported the ability to take on more work on days they worked from home, providing the best possible service to the American people.

Surely an administration that has preached about the virtues of the private sector would not drive its own agencies backward?

We call on Congress to hold hearings on SSA under your leadership and reopen our contract.

As these changes continue to harm the productivity of SSA employees, Americans who rely on our service will begin to take note. The American people need a Social Security Administration that is dedicated to providing the best customer service possible, and for that reason we call on Congress to hold hearings on SSA under your leadership and reopen our contract. You insist on casting blame on federal employees, but you forget that we come to work every day to serve the American people. As the late Elijah Cummings once said, "federal employees come to government to feed their souls, to help other people, to make their lives better." We need your fullest support to provide the best public service, and if you fail to do so, we call on Congress to stand up for federal employees.

Signed,

Ralph C. de Juliis
AFGE Council 220 President

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