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FACT-CHECKING PRESIDENT TRUMP'S SOTU IMMIGRATION STATEMENTS

President Trump used his 2018 State of the Union address to paint a misleading, and frankly Orwellian, picture of immigrants in the United States. Our immigration system is indeed broken, but not because it allows unlimited numbers of family members into the United States. It is broken because visa limits set decades ago have resulted in massive backlogs that keep families apart. A person who cares about family values would increase the ability for people to reunify with close relatives, not eliminate the legal channels for doing so.

- **A vast majority of immigrants in the United States are peaceful, law-abiding individuals who support their families and communities.** Immigrants are significantly less likely than native-born Americans to commit crimes. [Reports](#) have repeatedly shown that immigrants in the United States are less likely than native-born Americans to engage in crime.
- **[Reports](#) show that immigrants create millions of jobs in the United States, foster vital innovations, and contribute over \$12 billion a year to our Social Security fund.** [Ten percent of Americans](#) rely for their employment on private companies owned by immigrants. And despite Donald Trump's assertion that immigrants represent a drain on our public benefits system, [low-income immigrants actually use fewer benefits than low-income native-born Americans](#) and will [pay \\$600 billion into Social Security over the next 75 years](#).
- **U.S. vetting procedures, particularly those applied to refugees and diversity visa applicants, are the most strenuous in history.** These security checks are conducted by the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State, in coordination with the Department of Defense, the CIA, the National Counterterrorism Center, and other federal agencies.

Family-Based Immigration

Trump's Alternative Fact: "Under the current broken system, a single immigrant can bring in virtually unlimited numbers of distant relatives."

The Truth:

- Our immigration laws do not provide the ability to sponsor distant relatives, much less large numbers of them.
- Lawful permanent residents may only sponsor their spouses and children. As U.S. citizens, they may also sponsor their parents and siblings. There is simply no ability to sponsor grandparents, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins, or more distant relatives. The ability to sponsor certain children and siblings is subject to numerical limits and substantial backlogs that greatly limit family reunification.

Trump’s Alternative Fact: Trump’s immigration proposal would “protect the nuclear family by ending chain migration.”

The Truth:

- Eliminating options for family reunification does nothing to “protect the nuclear family.” Trump’s proposal would tear families apart by eliminating the current ability of a U.S. citizen to sponsor a parent, a child over the age of 20, a married child, or a sibling.

Diversity Visa Program

Trump’s Alternative Fact: The diversity visa program “randomly hands out green cards without any regard for skill, merit, or the safety of our people.”

The Truth:

- Applicants for diversity visas are required by law to show educational achievement or work experience. Specifically, applicants must have “at least a high school education or its equivalent” or “at least 2 years work experience in an occupation which requires at least 2 years of training or experience.” [8 U.S.C. 1153\(c\)\(2\)](#).
- Past studies show that diversity visa entrants tend to have higher educational and work achievement than other immigrants. For example, a [2011 report from the Congressional Research Service](#) shows that diversity visa winners were 2.5 times more likely to report managerial and professional occupations than all other lawful permanent residents.
- Second, diversity visa applicants are subject to in-person interviews, extensive background checks, and medical exams before acquiring their visas and entering the United States.

The Economy

Trump’s Alternative Fact: Our immigration laws “have allowed millions of low-wage workers to compete for jobs and wages against the poorest Americans.”

The Truth:

- [Economic studies](#) show that immigration boosts earnings for all American workers. And they help create jobs for American workers.
- According to the [Small Business Administration](#), immigrants are 30 percent more likely to start a business in the United States, and 18 percent of all small business owners are immigrants.
- The [Fiscal Policy Institute](#) found that immigrant businesses employed 4.7 million and generated \$776 million. Overall, immigrants [create millions of jobs in the United States, foster vital innovations, and contribute over \\$12 billion a year to our Social Security fund](#).

National Security

Trump’s Alternative Fact: “For decades, open borders have allowed drugs and gangs to pour into our most vulnerable communities.”

The Truth:

- The United States does not have open borders. To the contrary, illegal immigration levels have been falling for more than a decade, and the U.S. border is [now more secure](#) than at any time in the Nation’s history.

Trump’s Alternative Fact: Immigrants “have caused the loss of many innocent lives.”

The Truth:

- [Numerous studies](#) have found that immigrants are less likely to commit serious crimes than the native-born.

Trump’s Alternative Fact: Many “gang members took advantage of glaring loopholes in our laws to enter the country as unaccompanied alien minors.”

The Truth:

- Unaccompanied children arriving from Central America are [fleeing gang violence](#), not bringing it. Skyrocketing levels of gender, family, and gang violence in these countries leave youths with no choice but to flee or face gang recruitment, sexual and gender-based atrocities, or murder.
- The [United Nations refugee agency](#) has found that the majority of children coming to the southern border merit protection under international law.
- The presence of gangs in communities is a complex public safety issue requiring evidence-based solutions including gang prevention, not a fig leaf in the form of demagoguery of children.

Trump’s Alternative Fact: Trump’s immigration proposal “closes the terrible loopholes exploited by criminals and terrorists to enter our country.”

The Department of Justice recently published a [misleading report](#) claiming that a majority of individuals convicted of international terrorism related charges were foreign born. This flawed report was generated by the White House without input from career professionals at the Department of Homeland Security who have the data and expertise necessary to analyze immigration and terrorism-related statistics.

The Truth:

- A number of the individuals cited in the report were not immigrants, but rather individuals who committed offenses overseas and were transported to the United States for prosecution.
- The report provides no specificity about when these individuals entered the United States, what visa category they entered under, or when they may have been radicalized. The report asserts that 402 of 509 individuals convicted of international terrorism-related charges between September 11, 2001 and December 31, 2016, were foreign-born. However, it fails to put that number in context by providing the total number of foreign born individuals present during this timeframe. During this period, the United States admitted [16.8 million immigrants](#) and [an estimated 2 billion](#) temporary non-immigrants.
- With support from Congress, the Department of Homeland Security has implemented robust screening and vetting measures since the 9/11 attacks, enhancing our ability to detect potential security concerns and building an unprecedented level of security into the immigration process. Statistics involving many individuals who entered the United States prior to 9/11 says nothing about the security of the immigration system since 9/11.
- Studies have concluded that Americans are more likely to be killed by white supremacists than foreign born terrorists. The Trump administration has done little to counter the real threat of domestic terrorism and instead, President Trump has called white supremacists “very fine people.” The Southern Poverty Law Center has found that the [Trump campaign and presidency has energized the white supremacist movement in unprecedented ways](#). The FBI recently reported that [hate crimes reached a 5 year high in 2016](#), with a noticeable uptick around Donald Trump’s presidential victory.

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