

EDITORIAL

Immigration is lost in Congress

Securing borders and helping 'Dreamers' could be the start of a sound and sane policy. But separating families is a cruel tactic.

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

For weeks, the fierce national focus on immigration has been dominated by tales of children, and childish political manipulations.

As Congress nears its summer recess and members position themselves for primaries and the November general election, attempts to pass legislation have become frantic. But the bills in the House of Representatives push in opposite directions to satisfy drastically different constituencies. Meanwhile, the Senate is poised to do nothing, and both parties and President Donald Trump are muddying the waters with intra-party squabbles and cynical lies.

The administration recently has been assailed with two terrible accusations about how it has handled minors coming into the country. The claim that the government "lost" 1,475 children last year is false. The claim that the Department of Health and Human Services is separating children as young as 4 from their parents is true. But the amount of misrepresentation surrounding both is creating tremendous confusion that must be cleared up before the policy can be addressed with any clarity.

The federal government admits it lost track of 1,475 children last year, but that's neither ominous nor a cause for blame, as critics have claimed. In testimony before a Senate subcommittee last month, the Department of Health and Human Services explained the difficulty in checking up on the more than 7,000 unaccompanied minors it had placed with sponsors between last October and the end of last year. The agency made one call in each case to the contact phone number supplied and left a message when no one answered. Of those attempts, 1,475 elicited no response. This is not out of the ordinary. The sponsors and other members of the families these minors are placed with often have questionable legal residency themselves, and they might fear contact with authorities.



Central American migrants cross into the United States at Tijuana, Mexico, on May 4. U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials continued to receive asylum requests from mothers and children of a migrant caravan.

What's more, a call from the government can be the precursor to a minor immigrant's asylum hearing, which can lead to deportation. Many minors and sponsors are more comfortable slipping into the shadows than responding to such calls. But when news of the "missing" kids broke recently, it sparked a Twitter hashtag, #whereareourchildren, based on the incorrect belief that children in federal custody cannot be found. And to vilify the administration, opponents of Trump tweeted photos of children on the border in cages; but the photos were taken during the Obama administration in 2014.

Nevertheless, there is a tragedy going on involving such children because of the new rules Trump put in place.

Last month, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced a policy to separate children and parents caught entering the country illegally. It's purposely cruel because it is primarily designed to deter anyone from trying to come here without permission, including those seeking asylum, which cannot be applied for from outside the country. The rule is also based on a false anal-

ogy. Sessions argues that anyone arrested and incarcerated in any situation is separated from his or her children. But it's not a crime to cross into the United States when seeking asylum.

Stunned by the backlash against children being separated from parents and placed in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Trump and other officials claimed the separations are demanded by an Obama-era law, which is false. There is no law calling for such separations, just the administration's own new "zero tolerance" policy.

It is against this hyperemotional backdrop that Congress is failing to settle the two baseline immigration disputes: increased border security, with or without a wall, and the fate of the 800,000 "Dreamers" brought here illegally by their parents who have no residency status and no other home.

Some Democrats want citizenship for the "Dreamers," and no wall on our Southern border. Some Republicans want a huge wall and nothing for the "Dreamers." But in an unusual twist, House centrists in both parties want to defy their wings and come up with a

different approach. To do so, they are trying to use an obscure parliamentary procedure to force floor votes on several immigration options by banding together to overrule Speaker Paul Ryan.

Ryan will meet with his members Wednesday to try to re-establish order, but that may not be possible. Even if a bill were to pass, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell says he doesn't see anything moving in his chamber, and the president is all over the map about what he would sign. That means the House fuss is about passing a bill to bolster election hopes, not changing the law to solve problems. And because any resolution is unlikely, East End farmers can't get needed laborers and New York tech companies can't get experienced talent.

A compromise is needed to satisfy demands for border security and for permanent status for "Dreamers." It must also maintain our history of kind treatment of asylum-seekers, and of all people. Disseminating inflammatory lies may serve a purpose for certain politicians, on both sides of the aisle.

But it does not serve the nation.