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## TRUMP POLICY OF SEPARATING MIGRANT FAMILIES THREATENS TO ENGULF IMMIGRATION TALKS

*Divided GOP lawmakers on Capitol Hill are trying to show results on the issue of illegal immigration ahead of midterm elections*

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WASHINGTON – A Trump administration policy of separating immigrant children from adults at the southern border is putting pressure on Republicans and threatening to engulf broader negotiations on Capitol Hill about dealing with those already in the U.S. illegally.

The administration's "zero-tolerance policy" of detaining adults attempting to cross into the U.S. has resulted in the division of families traveling with children, and the federal government is beginning to run out of space for its detainees.

Rep. Will Hurd of Texas, a Republican whose district spans 800 miles of the Mexico border and who is locked in a competitive race for his seat, toured a temporary tent facility on the southern border the administration constructed to house the swelling number of separated children. He used the tour to distance himself from the administration's policy.

"This really isn't a Republican or Democratic issue," Mr. Hurd told CNN following the tour. "This is an issue about how should you treat children."

Meanwhile, divided Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill are trying to show results on the issue of illegal immigration ahead of midterm elections in which centrists and conservatives are facing competing demands from voters.

President Donald Trump will attend a meeting of the House Republican conference Tuesday night, and immigration is likely to be one of the topics on the agenda, said Marc Short, the president's legislative affairs chief, in an interview Sunday. "The policy is incredibly complicated and it is one we need to do a better job of communicating," Mr. Short said, of the issue of separating families. "We've not talked about the history of how we got to this point."

The GOP-controlled House of Representatives may vote on two Republican-crafted immigration measures this week, said the office of Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.).

One bill is assembled by negotiators from the GOP's moderate and conservative wings; another is more conservative. Both aim to address the fate of hundreds of thousands of young immigrants brought illegally to the U.S. as children, as well as seeking to increase border security.

Each would also broadly allow children arriving at the southern border to be detained with their parents in the same facility, or for the release of a child to a relative.

The White House has said that Mr. Trump would sign either bill if it passed.

In the Senate, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) was bruised by the collapse of an immigration bid earlier this year and has been skeptical that the Senate would take it up again while Republicans remain in possession of a slim 51-vote majority. He has said only that if the House passes something, and the president supports it, he would be willing to reconsider.

A decades-old court settlement bars the U.S. government from jailing migrant children. Until recently, the result was that families who crossed the border seeking asylum were often released into the U.S. while their cases are pursued.

The Department of Homeland Security said Friday that it had separated 1,995 immigrant children from 1,940 adults, whom it described as “alleged adult parents,” at the border between mid-April and the end of May.

The administration hasn’t said what percentage of adult immigrants have been prosecuted, though Homeland Security has said it has implemented a zero-tolerance policy for all adults and is referring every such immigrant for prosecution. DHS and the Justice Department haven’t said how officials decide which cases to prosecute and which families to separate.

In May, more than 9,400 people traveling as families were arrested at the Mexican border, along with about 6,400 children who were traveling alone. Since the start of the budget year in October, more than 32,000 unaccompanied immigrant children have been taken into custody by the U.S. Border Patrol along the Mexican border. That is a 4 percent increase over the same period in 2017. Separately, more than 59,000 people traveling as families have been arrested at the border during that same period, a slight decrease over 2017.

Mr. Short said Republicans needed to do more to emphasize their arguments that immigration rules had created an incentive for adults to seek to make dangerous border crossings with children in tow, and that establishing more beds to house children and adults together would untie border security officials’ hands.

Democratic lawmakers spent the weekend visiting detention facilities at the southern border and elsewhere, including a group of New York and New Jersey Democrats that toured a center in Elizabeth, N.J., to make their case.

“Republicans control every branch of government,” said Rep. Bill Pascrell (D., N.J.). “They are making these disgraces happen every day.”

The administration is facing increasing pressure on existing facilities, even without the possibility of new facilities to detain families together. The Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement is adding bed space after eclipsing more than 11,000 children in its custody. A temporary, soft-sided structure has been erected in Tornillo, Texas, near El Paso, as part of that expansion.

Eric Hargan, deputy secretary of HHS, said in a statement Sunday that the agency had welcomed lawmakers’ tours and that the semi-permanent structures – including at Tornillo – had ventilation and cooling “to ensure appropriate temperature” for the minors placed there, who, he said, were all teenagers.

Mr. Trump and other advisers had maintained that it is up to Congress – and specifically Democrats, whose votes would be needed to pass legislation in the Senate – to put an end

to the family separations. Mr. Trump has insisted that Congress adopt tighter border security in response, including offering funding for his long-promised border wall.

On Monday morning, the president again tried to put the onus on Democrats, even as Republicans control enough seats in the House, though not in the Senate, to pass an immigration bill on their own. In a tweet, Mr. Trump wrote: "Why don't the Democrats give us the votes to fix the world's worst immigration laws? Where is the outcry for the killings and crime being caused by gangs and thugs, including MS-13, coming into our country illegally?"

His office of the press secretary had also sent out talking points late Friday arguing that American families were victims of "permanent separation" when they were subjected to violent crimes committed by immigrants in the U.S. illegally.

Some allies continued to make that case for Mr. Trump Sunday. Former chief strategist Steve Bannon, appearing on ABC News' "This Week with George Stephanopoulos," said that he believed the policy required no defensive posture.

"It's zero tolerance, I don't think you have to justify it," Mr. Bannon said.

But elsewhere, signs of a shift emerged.

"As a mother, as a Catholic, as someone who's got a conscience. I will tell you that nobody likes this policy," said Kellyanne Conway, a senior adviser to Mr. Trump, on NBC's "Meet the Press."

First lady Melania Trump issued a rare policy statement on Sunday.

"Mrs. Trump hates to see children separated from their families and hopes both sides of the aisle can finally come together to achieve successful immigration reform," said her spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham. "She believes we need to be a country that follows all laws, but also a country that governs with heart."

The issue has also drawn criticism from the United Nations' human-rights chief. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in a speech Monday called for the U.S. to stop separating migrant children from their parents, saying the practice was unconscionable.

(-Natalie Andrews, Siobhan Hughes and Giovanni Legorano contributed to this article.)