

## How the US border crisis could have been averted

By [Mary Kay Linge](#) and [Isabel Vincent](#)  
New York Post, May 4, 2019

The crisis at the US-Mexico border could have been headed off 11 months ago — but for 21 votes in the House of Representatives.

A bill proposed by then-Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.) would have ended the “catch-and-release” cycle that encourages migrants to claim asylum in the first place.

But that was just a footnote to a grand bargain that included legalizing DACA recipients, abolishing chain migration and spending \$9.3 billion on a border wall.

It collapsed under its own weight — and in the face of waffling from President Trump, who gave it his blessing, but then hedged.

“What is the purpose of the House doing good immigration bills when you need 9 votes by Democrats in the Senate,” he grouched in a June 21, 2018, tweet.

Hours later, 41 Republicans joined the entire Democratic caucus to defeat it.

That was the closest Congress came to solving the illegal-immigration impasse that 80 percent of Americans now call a “serious problem” or worse, according to a Washington Post poll last week.

“Trump needs Congress’ help, but he has not asked for it in any coherent way,” said Steven Camarota, director of research at the Center for Immigration Studies.

Thousands of migrants a day are giving themselves up to US authorities at the border, seeking asylum protection under international law by claiming “credible fear” of persecution back home.

Border agents [intercepted more than 100,000](#) of them in March, a 12-year high.

Courts face a backlog of nearly 900,000 cases that can take more than four years to decide, one immigration lawyer told The Post — and most applicants remain free in the US until their cases are heard.

Now Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) plans a new strategy: tackling the asylum problem on its own.

“Let’s toughen up our asylum standards,” he told Fox News last month, describing a bill in the works that “will stop this madness” and tamp down asylum claims using some of the tactics that Goodlatte’s 2018 bill included.

“These laws are insane,” Graham added, listing multiple loopholes that migrants know to exploit. “And we need to change them.”

Other legislators are doing the same, with new bills that break the immigration standoff into bite-sized chunks: the House Democrats’ Dream and Promise Act

to protect DACA recipients, a Senate GOP proposal for a merit-based legal immigration system, and more.

Behind the scenes, the White House has been sweet-talking some congressional Democrats, according to Graham.

“But they’ve already burned a lot of their bridges with Congress,” warned Sarah Pierce, a policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute in Washington.

Meanwhile, Trump has issued a stream of regulations that add teeth to the asylum laws on the books — even though his attempts, most recently an effort to [force asylum-seekers to remain in Mexico](#) while they await US court hearings, have been repeatedly slapped down or held up in court.

Last month, Attorney General William Barr laid out new rules keeping asylum claimants in detention centers as they wait to see a judge. A pilot DNA-testing program is underway, according to reports, as well as a policy expanding Border Patrol agents’ power to refuse entry to migrants who lack legitimate grounds for asylum.

And Trump is still pushing for a major deal.

“We’re actually going for a much bigger package rather than those little things,” Trump said of Graham’s pending bill in a Fox News interview last week.

“It’s just a situation that Congress can fix,” Trump said. “And they don’t get off their ass.”