

2-7 Immigration and Border Bill.mp3

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:00:03] Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema is trying to sell her fellow senators on proposed border security legislation, which also contains continued aid to Ukraine and Israel. She spent months negotiating this bill with Republican Jim Lankford and Democrat Chris Murphy.

Kyrsten Sinema [00:00:20] We've all seen the images on television of what's happening in Louisville, Arizona, and in southern Texas, where large numbers of migrants are approaching the border and being processed and kind of released into the country. Sometimes with a piece of paper called a Notice to appear, where they may see a judge in five, seven, ten years. No one knows. Our law changes that. And in the practice of catch and release.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:00:50] The \$118 billion bipartisan bill would overhaul some of the Biden administration's immigration policies and address the record number of migrants crossing the US-Mexico border. It faces an early test vote on Wednesday in the Senate, where at least a handful of Republicans must allow the measure to proceed for consideration.

Ron Hansen [00:01:11] But the real hurdle is whether it can pass the GOP controlled House after former President Donald Trump has led calls to oppose anything short of what they view as a perfect bill. House speaker Mike Johnson has already announced his opposition to the bill, suggesting this measure, like so many before it over the past 20 years, may be headed nowhere.

House Speaker Mike Johnson [00:01:33] This is dead on arrival. There's no way we could bring this through the House. The Senate expects us to pass a bill, a piece of legislation. What it would do is actually further incentivize illegal immigration. It would not resolve any of the problems, not reform in any meaningful way. The broken asylum system, the broken parole process, and all the things that have created this catastrophe. And by the way, meanwhile, it further empowers the very cabinet secretary who designed and created this mess. They don't follow federal law. Why would we do this anyway? But the bill itself would actually do more harm than good. And that's why we've said it's a nonstarter over here in the House.

Ron Hansen [00:02:15] Welcome to The Gaggle, a weekly politics podcast from The Arizona Republic and azcentral.com. I'm Ron Hansen. I cover national politics for the Republic.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:02:25] And I'm Mary Jo Pitzl. I cover state politics and policy. This week, we're talking about the border security bill that Arizona's Kyrsten Sinema has played a role in negotiating. Joining us in studio is the Republic's Rafael Carranza, who covers immigration and border matters for the Republic. Rafael, always good to have you on The Gaggle.

Rafael Carranza [00:02:46] Thank you so much for having me again.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:02:52] So in a nutshell, what are the key provisions of this bill?

Rafael Carranza [00:02:57] Well, this is a very large bill that, as you mentioned, would set aside approximately \$118 billion, primarily for military spending. That's about 60 billion for Ukraine, 14 billion for Israel, 10 billion for humanitarian aid, which would include aid to

Gaza. But the part that I think is getting more attention at the moment are the border provisions. And the bill sets aside 20 billion for that. Essentially, it would upend the way that migrants are able to access asylum in the US. It gives the federal government, for example, the ability to shut down asylum processing along the entire border outside of the ports of entry. If the number of migrants approaching the border gets too high. And it also changes what happens to migrants after border officials process them at the border. The most notable change about that is that it would reduce the length of time that it would take U.S. officials to make a decision on whether someone can get asylum or not, and it would reduce that from years, which is the process currently to about six months under this new proposal.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:03:54] Okay. That's what's in the bill. Now tell us what's not in there.

Rafael Carranza [00:03:58] Well, this is definitely not a comprehensive immigration reform bill. And I think they have been very clear about this. It's more of a reduced effort. And so, for example, this bill does not address what would happen to dream. Or these are the individuals who arrived into the U.S. when they were younger, are undocumented and have been here. They may have protection under DACA. They may not. But it also doesn't include information about farm workers, essential workers, as we heard a lot during the pandemic, or the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants that live in the United States. It also does not update the legal visa system, which has kind of stayed in place for nearly four decades without any meaningful changes. And that means that it can take many, many, many years for anyone to try to move to the U.S. legally.

Ron Hansen [00:04:44] Roughly. Even before the broad outlines of this bill were revealed, some Republicans took pains to announce their opposition to it. Donald Trump went the extra mile to say Republicans should oppose anything less than everything they want on this.

Speaker 6 [00:04:58] You have given us a product that, quite frankly, is offensive to the American people and unacceptable.

House Speaker Mike Johnson [00:05:05] And this bill does not meet the criteria. And that's why it.

President Donald Trump [00:05:08] Was no good for the Republicans. And frankly, any Republican that signs it should be ashamed of himself or herself. I don't think there's anything you can do that's worse than a bad immigration deal. And they're doing a bad deal. You're better off not having a deal than having a bad deal. And that's what they're negotiating.

Ron Hansen [00:05:22] Congress has talked about wanting to do something comprehensive on border security or immigration or both. Since President George W Bush was in office, is there any reason to think that this time will end any differently?

Rafael Carranza [00:05:36] I think this attempt will definitely face a very daunting task of trying to convince not just Republicans, as you mentioned, Ron, but also Democrats. Republicans are once again campaigning on the border. We have presidential elections coming up in November. And because the white House is supporting this deal, passing it would essentially give Biden a win during this election year. And Republicans don't want that passing this bill would blunt a lot of the attacks that they lobbied against Biden, including trying to impeach, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas.

Democrats, on the other hand, are very unhappy with this bill as well, because they don't like the changes that it would make to the asylum system without tackling some of the larger immigration reforms that they say would kind of have more of a meaningful or bigger impact. They also see many of the provisions in this bill, such as the ability to shut down the border to asylum processing as sort of a Trump era wish list. These are laws that, you know, were popular, or that Trump tried and ultimately failed to implement or were restricted by the courts.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:06:39] So if there's people on both sides of the aisle unhappy with this bill, where's Arizona's delegates? Where do they fall?

Rafael Carranza [00:06:46] They pretty much fall along party lines, although not neatly. You do have Republicans who are pretty unified in their opposition, and that's not surprising given that they are very critical of President Joe Biden and the way that he has handled the border. The majority of the House Republicans have said that this deal essentially empowers or gives more funding to Ukraine than it does to the US-Mexico border. They also criticize the fact that it would give additional powers to Mayorkas when they are trying to impeach him. On the other hand, most of the Democrats also support this bill and the fact that it's a compromise legislation. But you do have a lone holdout, which I think is pretty notable. And that happens to be Raul Grijalva. He's the dean of the delegation. And he says that, you know, this bill essentially is a rehash of Trump's policies and says that it does not go far enough in trying to reform the entire immigration system. So pretty much along the split lines. But. Something notable there is that we haven't heard from two of the legislators that are kind of more at risk. That is David Schweikert as well as Juan Cisco Mani. They are up for reelection, very competitive elections. And so even though they've been critical of Biden so far, we have yet to hear from them about how they feel about this legislation.

Ron Hansen [00:08:11] Rather, give us a quick update on the current situation and the border. There's just so much interest in this issue generally, but I don't think people have a great sense of what the conditions are, and they change over time anyway. The Louisville Port of Entry, for example, was shut down for a month, reopening in early January, and the shutdown was due to a crush of migrants that Border Patrol couldn't handle. Have the numbers dropped since then, and if so, why?

Rafael Carranza [00:08:40] We have seen a general decrease in the number of migrants that have been reaching the US-Mexico border. And there's a number of factors. And I think that the administration, for example, has championed a lot of their efforts as crediting, you know, their efforts to this reduction. But we also have to remember that Mexico plays a very critical and crucial role in this partnership as well. And we've seen in recent weeks that they've stepped up enforcement south of the border in Mexico to to stop more migrants from reaching the US-Mexico border. And these actions come after several high level meetings between US and Mexican officials, including visits by the Homeland Security Secretary and the Secretary of State to meet with the President of Mexico. In the past few weeks, as well as phone calls between the Mexican and US presidents. So that debate and that conversation is ongoing as well.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:09:32] President Biden has threatened to shut down the border if this bill doesn't pass. That sounds like what a lot of Republicans have wanted for decades. So what does that mean? And why not just do it now?

Rafael Carranza [00:09:44] There would be a lot of opposition from Democrats if Biden takes this measure. And I think we have to keep in mind that everything that we talk about when it comes to the border right now is through the lens of the election. And ultimately, you know, the Republicans have been relatively successful in attacking Biden on the border. And from what we've seen so far, those attacks are working. Polling suggests that voters give Trump an edge over Biden, over this. So Biden, I think, acknowledges that there's a weakness on this aspect for him when it comes to the border. But if he does take any sort of action that could also potentially disenfranchise Democrats, or already we know that they're not enthusiastic to support or to vote for him. So that could even further antagonize some of those voters as well.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:10:30] So how long has this deal been in the works, and is there anything in it that is especially attributable to Sinema a? Do we see any of her fingerprints distinctly in this?

Rafael Carranza [00:10:42] These negotiations have been going on for about two months or so. They have involved Sinema a as well as, you know, the two senators that you mentioned, Senator Murphy and Senator Lankford. But at times they've also included the white House, who backed some of these more restrictive approaches to asylum, and then also the Senate leadership from both parties that have been involved. They've supported this measure as well, even though the majority of other Republicans and many other Democrats don't necessarily view this bill favorably. But in terms of what Sinema a has really been championing for. It's not really clear what elements of this bill are because she's been pushing for them necessarily. She's kind of established her role as a mediator and negotiator. So trying to take different parts from different aspects and kind of bringing them together. And she's really kind of championed her ability to bring people together or to kind of bridge these divides into coming up with a deal. But she certainly does talk about the fact that she is from a border state. She routinely talks about the fact that she was born in Tucson, and that these are issues that are impacting people on the ground in border states as well. But within this bill, there are certain provisions that Sinema has kind of been championing and advocating for. Some of those include the Fender Fentanyl Act, which targets the supply chain of fentanyl. And then you also have the funding for border nonprofits, which she, along with Senator Mark Kelly, have had been really early advocates and ever since then had been working to secure additional funding to provide humanitarian aid services to migrants along the border.

Ron Hansen [00:12:18] Given the history of this issue, if this bill goes down in the House or the Senate. What happens next? Is there any momentum for another try this year, or should voters expect that this is just left untouched until after the election?

Rafael Carranza [00:12:34] In my experience, and judging from past election years, I think the bet is likely on not getting anything done simply because that's just kind of how it's been during the election years, and especially with an issue as contentious as immigration and the. Order. That said, you know, there are a lot of smaller provisions within this bill that do have a lot more support from either or both parties that we could see resurface later. Some of those provisions that I want to highlight, for example, this bill would provide a path to permanent residency to Afghan allies who were evacuated to the US after the Taliban took over control of Afghanistan. They've been under humanitarian parole in the country now for a little over two years, but that means that they don't have a permanent path to stay in the country. So there's broad support to do something for U.S. allies that are already here in the country. And then another provision that I also want to highlight is the funding for nonprofits at the border. The federal government has been reimbursing a lot of

the nonprofits and local governments at the border, as well as in the interior of the country, for providing humanitarian aid services to migrants. That money has run out. It ran out months ago. And so a lot of the nonprofits are asking for additional funding to continue that work. And so I anticipate that that could kind of generate more pressure once again, to try to get some additional funding headed towards these nonprofits and local governments. But in addition to Afghans, we're talking about U.S. allies. You also have to look at the military funding for Ukraine and Israel. These are issues that, you know, still have support, broad support from both sides of the aisle. And so we anticipate that that will come up once again, even if this bill fails.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:14:18] Well, Rafat, thank you for joining us. If people want to follow your work either online or social media, where can they find you?

Rafael Carranza [00:14:26] Well, they can follow my account on Twitter. The handle is at Rafael Carranza. That's Carranza.

Ron Hansen [00:14:36] Very good. Well, Rafa, thanks as always for joining us. That is it for this week. Gaggle listeners, do you have questions about today's episode or topics you'd like us to cover in the show in the future? Send us a message at (602) 444-0804, or voice memo to TheGaggle@ArizonaRepublic.com. That's one word all spelled out.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:15:02] This episode was edited and produced by Kelly Monahan with support from Amanda Luberto. Episode oversight is by Kara Edgerson and our news direction is from Kathy Tulumello. Our theme song and music comes from Universal Production Music.

Ron Hansen [00:15:18] Never miss an episode of The Gaggle by subscribing to us wherever you listen. If you learned something new today, be sure to share this episode with a friend. You can also leave us a review and rate us five stars. You can follow The Gaggle on social media [@azcpodcasts](https://twitter.com/azcpodcasts). I'm [@RonaldJHansen](https://twitter.com/RonaldJHansen).

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:15:43] And I'm [@MaryJPitzl](https://twitter.com/MaryJPitzl). That's pretty cool. The Gaggle is an Arizona Republic and azcentral.com production. See you next week.