

Headline: Former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta criticizes divided Congress on immigration reform, says Biden executive order limiting asylum claims was “necessary”

Former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta told reporters Tuesday that President Joe Biden’s executive order limiting the number of asylum seekers at the U.S. border was “necessary” due to Congress failing to compromise on immigration reform.

[Biden announced](#) that asylum seekers on the U.S-Mexico border will not be allowed entry when the Southern border is “overwhelmed.” This move comes after the Senate [failed to advance](#) a bipartisan immigration bill in May. The bill [included measures](#) – including added personnel – intended to manage the asylum system.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection called for Congress to act in its [April update](#).

“We are still experiencing challenges along the borders and the nation’s immigration system is not appropriately resourced to handle them,” said the senior official performing the duties of the commissioner, [Troy Miller](#), in the update. “We continue to call on Congress to take action that would provide our personnel with additional resources and tools.”

The Department of Homeland Security [removed and returned 720,000](#) people between May 2023 and April – most of whom were encountered on the Southern border, according to CBP. This was the highest number of removals and returns in a full fiscal year since 2011.

The failure to pass the bill left the country with an immigration system that Panetta described as “broken.”

“It’s tragic,” Panetta said. “We want to have a legal process that can control immigration so that everybody can come into this country on a legal basis. Unfortunately, because of lack of resources, lack of will, we’ve been unable to get there.”

While Panetta agreed that Biden’s executive order was a step in the right direction, he said it was not a replacement for comprehensive reform. In order to fix the immigration system, Democrats and Republicans need to be willing to work together and compromise, Panetta said.

“It would be a hell of a lot better if both sides were willing to work together on Capitol Hill and come up with immigration reform,” Panetta said. “Bipartisan compromise is the best way to go because both sides have a commitment to make it work.”

There is no overlap in the ideologies of the least liberal Democrats and the least conservative Republicans in Congress since 2004, according to [Pew Research Center](#). From 2016 to 2020, the amount of people who identified as “extremely ideological” rose from 6.5% to 9.4%, the highest percentage since the American National Election Studies [began the survey in 1972](#).

“The only way it works in a democracy is if both sides are willing to listen and work together,” Panetta said. “I’m afraid it’s going to take a while before we get back to that.”