

Hello Riley,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on your article.

[In a 2012 report, Politifact argued that in order for a policy to be truly considered amnesty, it must be legal relief that has two components: targeted toward a specific group of people and permanent in nature.](#)

The author asserted that criticisms of Obama's executive action on young illegal immigrants as "amnesty" were "mostly false" because the legal relief they provided from deportation was not permanent, and information provided to officials during the application process might be used in deportation proceedings down the line. They did not dispute that the executive action did not meet the first component, conceding that illegal immigrants are discrete and insular enough to be considered a specific group of people.

"Legally, amnesty focuses on a group of people and grants them a permanent pardon. The Obama administration's policy could reasonably be said to focus on a group, but deferring deportation is not the same as forgiveness and the relief it offers is limited in time," the author wrote. "Concerns about where this policy might lead are a valid topic for discussion, but go beyond what the policy actually says." In this instance, we do not have to speculate where the policy would lead. It leads to citizenship.

I believe our claim that Nelson supports amnesty as indicated by his Yes vote on Senate Joint Resolution 21 on the 2015 legislature is at the very least "mostly true" on your scale, given that SJR 21's provisions explicitly call for a pathway to citizenship. In all but the most extraordinary cases, citizenship can be thought of as a permanent guard against deportation. In other words, a pathway to citizenship is a measure of permanent legal relief targeted at a specific group of people. This meets both of Politifact's stated criteria.

I also contend that the term "pathway to citizenship" has entered the political lexicon as a euphemism for amnesty, and not just for those with a conservative perspective.

[The San Diego Free Press, a self described "grassroots and progressive" publication featured an article where a pathway to citizenship was bluntly described as amnesty:](#) "All past and current immigration plans submitted by U.S. presidential administrations, and Congress' both Democratic and Republican have since the 1970's included amnesty proposals. The proposals basically stipulate that undocumented persons must; 'establish a responsible pathway to earned citizenship—that includes passing a background check, paying taxes and a meaningful penalty, learning English and going to the back of the line (up to 24 years) behind the folks trying to come here legally.'" Though the writer concludes that Latino immigrants are guilty of no crime and therefore in no need of amnesty, she equates the word and phrase—from her perspective, a pathway to citizenship and amnesty are the same.

[Southern California Public Radio—not a bastion of conservative thought—wrote an expository piece on immigration reform, comparing and contrasting the 1986 amnesty law and the 2013 path to citizenship](#), noting at several points that the 2013 path provides even more generous legal relief than the 1986 amnesty law—a law clearly named before the idea of amnesty became politically contentious. While the piece notes that there are key differences between the two specific legislative proposals, it concedes “the endgame is the same” for both: permanent legal relief for illegal aliens currently residing in the United States, also known as amnesty.

[CNN, also writing an expository piece to explain the country’s on going immigration proposals, literally lists the characterization of a pathway to citizenship as amnesty in the sentence that follows the introduction of that concept](#): “The eight senators say their plan will secure the border and provide a path to citizenship some undocumented immigrants already in the country. Critics say the citizenship component is granting amnesty for those who entered the country illegally.” The same piece also notes that Texas Republican Lamar Smith takes the pathway to citizenship proposal to mean the same thing as amnesty for granted: “Texas Republican Rep. Lamar Smith put out a statement on Monday arguing ‘by granting amnesty, the Senate proposal actually compounds the problem by encouraging more illegal immigration.’”

At the very least, the two concepts are closely enough associated that the one word can be legitimately used as a criticism of the phrase.

The call for a pathway to citizenship, while conclusive, does not appear in SJR 21 without context. It appears next to language and talking points regularly deployed by groups both nationally and locally in support of arguments legalizing individuals who currently reside in the United States in violation of our country’s laws. The Resolution calls for an end to the “separation of families”—an idea and phrase regularly repeated around the country by pro-amnesty advocates, and none less than [Southern Nevada’s own Astrid Silva](#). It is also echoed by pro-amnesty groups like [Immigration Impact](#) and [Center for American Progress](#) nationally and the [Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada](#) locally.

I believe this provides important context—the phrase pathway to citizenship is a euphemism for amnesty, unconditional or otherwise, that is frequently couched in common pro-amnesty rhetoric.

I respectfully submit that our campaign’s claim is fully true using Politifact’s own standards—Nelson voted in favor of SJR 21, along with every Democrat in the Nevada legislature. Taken together, the provisions encouraged in SJR 21—a form of permanent legal relief offered to illegal immigrants in the form of a pathway to citizenship couched in arguments associated with pro-amnesty groups—urge amnesty as a policy solution for America’s current immigration problems.

Respectfully,  
Victoria Seaman

