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# Trump uses the coronavirus to impede immigration. His aim at foreign students is a new low.

Opinion by [Editorial Board](#)

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THE TRUMP administration has used the novel [coronavirus](#) as license to indiscriminately kill off and impede every sort of immigration — legal and illegal, permanent and temporary, work- and family-based. [On Monday](#), it [took aim at](#) the more than 1 million international students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities, threatening them with deportation if their classes move online, as many already have.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement made the announcement as a growing number of colleges, facing a widening pandemic, have shifted entirely or largely to virtual learning for the fall. International students at those institutions, who represent a sizable cohort, will have to go home or transfer to another school that offers in-person classes.

ICE provided no rationale — unsurprising, given that it is unfair and irrational as a matter of policy. But within hours of its announcement, President Trump sought to make school closings into an election issue. Democrats, he claimed on Twitter, want schools closed “for political reasons, not health reasons,” to help them in the fall elections.

That’s preposterous. Colleges and universities have scrambled to devise plans to operate safely in the fall, in some cases pivoting from one scenario to another as the virus has spread. Last week, the University of Southern California reversed course, scrapping a mix of in-person and online classes at its campus in pandemic-plagued Los Angeles and shifting to a mostly virtual schedule. Those decisions have nothing to do with partisan politics, nothing to do with the fall elections and nothing to do with Mr. Trump.

The new rule means colleges that depend critically on tuition revenue from international students — many from China, India and South Korea — will be under pressure to offer in-person classes even in places where covid-19 is a major threat. International students will face deportation even if their colleges, facing a fresh outbreak, shift mid-semester from in-person to online classes. International students with preexisting conditions will feel forced to attend in-person classes despite the risk to their lives.

Those students, who constitute 5.5 percent of overall higher education enrollment, contributed more than \$40 billion to the U.S. economy in the 2019-2020 academic year. They provide a steady stream of energetic, talented youth, some of whom make key contributions to the U.S. economy and form lifelong ties with U.S. businesses and scientific and cultural institutions.

None of that matters to Mr. Trump, who has made it a personal and political crusade to rid the nation, to the extent possible, of foreigners. Last month, his administration suspended work visas for various non-immigrant categories and widened a ban on new green cards for applicants outside of this country. Under cover of the pandemic, asylum seekers have been effectively banned from the United States for the first time in modern history, and many U.S. embassies and consulates remain shut, closing off other avenues of legal entry for visitors, workers and immigrants alike.

The president's goal is to turn America's back on the world. Sadly, it is Americans, and institutions like U.S. universities, that will pay the price.