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Reason for mass release of illegal immigrants "hard to believe," Boehner says

By [Lindsey Boerma](#)

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House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, Tuesday in an interview with CBS News blasted the "outrageous" move by federal immigration officials to OK the release of hundreds of illegal immigrants as a way to save money ahead of Friday's fast-approaching sequestration.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) earlier today announced it had released on probation "a number of detained aliens" around the country "in order to make the best use of our limited detention resources in the current fiscal climate, and to manage our detention population under current congressionally mandate levels."

The deep and across-the-board sequester cuts that will go into effect barring an 11th hour act of compromise on Capitol Hill would mean fewer border security agents and less money to house detained illegal immigrants.

"This is very hard for me to believe, that they can't find cuts elsewhere in their agency," Boehner told "CBS Evening News" anchor Scott Pelley. "I frankly think this is outrageous."

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Boehner's indignation has been matched throughout the day by fellow Republicans who have called it a political gambit by the White House administration. President Obama has been touring the country sounding the alarm on the dramatic impact of the cuts and calling on Congress to pass an alternative before the March 1 deadline that combines spending cuts with additional revenue by way of tax increases.

"I'm looking for more facts," Boehner continued, "but I can't believe that they can't find the kind of savings they need out of that department short of letting criminals go free."

Asked by Pelley on what he thinks is going on, Boehner replied: "I think that the administration is trying to play games -- play games with the American people, scare the American people. This is not leadership."

The speaker also added: ["The White House is] out there making a lot of noise. What they really ought to be doing is coming up to the Hill and working with the Senate Democrats to pass a bill that can replace the sequester, and begin to deal with our long-term spending problem."

ICE in a statement stressed that it will continue to supervise the released detainees and prosecute them in immigration court - "and, when ordered, will seek their removal from the country." Detaining "serious criminal offenders and other individuals who pose a significant threat to public safety," the statement said, remains a priority.

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