



responding to you

1 message

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Thank you for sharing your concerns about the immigration legislation that passed out of the Senate on June 27. I'm glad to hear from you on this important issue.

A bipartisan immigration group in the Senate released their immigration reform proposal on April 16. The Senate Judiciary Committee, of which I am the Ranking Republican, has jurisdiction over immigration issues. The committee held several hearings and conducted a "mark-up" that took several weeks. On May 23rd, it approved S. 744, The Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act and reported it to the full Senate by a vote of 13-5. On June 27, the Senate approved the bill by a vote of 68 to 32. I voted against it.

The immigration bill contains four different titles dealing with border security, legalization, interior enforcement and legal immigration. It provides individuals currently residing in the country illegally with a special status – known as Registered Provisional Immigrant (RPI) status – that is renewable upon application for citizenship. The Secretary can provide RPI status six months after he or she submits a southern border security strategy.

I have often spoken about the 1986 amnesty and how that law failed the American people. Promises were made and never kept. We said it was a one-time fix, but it did nothing to solve the problem. In fact, it only made matters worse and encouraged illegality. People came forward for legal status, but many more illegally entered or overstayed their welcome to get the same benefits and chance at citizenship. I voted for the 1986 bill, and it didn't solve the problem. We screwed up. And, today, we're right back at the same place, talking about the same problems, and proposing the same solutions.

I came into this debate with an open mind, with the goal of offering amendments to improve the bill. Unfortunately, the Majority never allowed the fair and open process on the floor that we were promised. Over 550 amendments were filed to the underlying bill; however, we were only allowed to vote on 10 amendments.

One of the 10 amendments was my amendment to change the fundamental flaw that allows legalization first, enforcement later. My amendment would have required the Secretary to certify to Congress that the Secretary has maintained effective control over the entire Southern border for six months before processing applications for Registered Provisional Immigrant status. It's a common sense approach: border security first.

Despite what the bipartisan group of authors wrote in their framework for immigration reform, legalization is NOT contingent upon our success in securing our borders and addressing visa overstays. The bill won't ensure that a future Congress isn't back in 25 years or less dealing with the same problems.

We need a bill that ensures results. We need a bill that puts security before legalization, not the other way around. We are a nation based on the rule of law. We have a right to protect our sovereignty and a duty to protect the homeland. The border security measures should be real and immediate, not 10 years down the road.

We also need meaningful interior enforcement, including allowing immigration officers to do their job and work with state and local officials.

Enforcement of the immigration laws has been lax and increasingly selective in the last few years. Because federal immigration enforcement officers have been restricted from doing their job, the states have tried to step up. Yet, they have been denied the opportunity to control their own borders.

The unfortunate reality is that the bill does almost nothing to strengthen our interior enforcement efforts. It does nothing to encourage cooperation between the federal, state and local governments. The federal government will continue to look the other way as millions of new people enter the country illegally. Meanwhile, the bill gives the States no new authority to act when the federal government refuses.

One of the major reasons why immigration is a subject of significant public interest is the failure of the federal government to enforce existing law. Eleven million people have unlawfully entered the country or overstayed their visa because the federal government did not deter them or take action to remove them. The bill significantly weakens current criminal laws and will hinder the ability of law enforcement to protect Americans from criminal undocumented aliens.

In addition to weakening current law, the bill does very little to deter criminal behavior in the future. It ignores sanctuary cities, and increases the thresholds required for actions to constitute a crime. And, regrettably, the bill is weak on foreign national criminal street gang members.

Furthermore, the bill falls short in protecting American workers who need and want jobs in this country. While I support allowing businesses to bring in foreign workers, they should only do so when qualified Americans are not available.

I have long argued that we must enhance and expand opportunities for people who wish to work legally in the country. Yet, as we do that, we cannot forget the American worker. We need to fight for them as well.

I empathize with people who come into this country to have a better life. We would do anything to give our kids a better life. We're a compassionate people. And, we're also the best country in the world. But, we're a great country because we've always abided by the rule of law. The rule of law is what makes all opportunities that we have possible.

While I voted against the bill, I have hopes for a better product to come out of a conference committee. My hope is that we send a bill to the President that will make America stronger, make our border more secure, and make our immigration system more effective. That's what Americans deserve, and what we have a responsibility to deliver.

Sincerely,
Chuck

P.S. To read the statements I gave on the Senate floor during the three week debate on immigration, and to review other material on immigration or other federal matters, please visit my website at www.grassley.senate.gov.

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