

Border Security and Immigration

The September 11 terrorist attacks raised serious questions about the security of our borders. In response to the attacks, the Bush Administration made enormous progress in securing the southern border. Specifically, the Administration recruited additional Border Patrol agents, deployed new technologies at the border, and erected physical barriers.

These efforts have contributed to a reduction in the illegal alien population in the U.S. and to an expansion of cross-border security cooperation with Mexico. Sustaining these efforts is an essential component of regaining control of America's southern border and battling cross-border crime cartels while improving the flow of legal goods and services across the border.

Whether the issue is drug smuggling, illegal immigration, or the terrorist threat, securing America's borders is a vital security challenge. Gaining control of the border is not optional—the security of the United States depends on the ability and determination of the U.S. government to keep its citizens safe. The U.S. can, and should, do it in such a way that fosters prosperity for Americans and Mexicans alike.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Enforce immigration and workplace laws to reduce the economic incentives for illegal immigration. The executive branch is responsible for implementing laws passed by Congress, but immigration reform is possible only if the government defends its laws.

2. Safeguard the southern border to make illegal entry into the United States less attractive than legal avenues. The porous southern border makes illegal entry into the United States an easier and more attractive option than the legal avenues. Conscious efforts should be made to give the U.S. government greater awareness along the border. The physical and technological fence is only part of the solution. More border agents are needed, more technology has to be deployed, and federal authorities must cooperate and collaborate more with state and local law enforcement.

Notes

3. Promote economic development and good governance in Latin America to provide potential illegal immigrants with economic opportunities at home. The lack of job opportunities in Latin America encourages those desperate for work to enter the U.S. illegally. Meanwhile, employers readily offer work to those who are here illegally. This “push-pull” effect can only be addressed by engaging both sides. Aiding Latin American countries in their efforts for economic development will greatly reduce the pressure for their citizens to come to the United States illegally. In Mexico, it is vital that the U.S. help the Mexican government combat the drug cartels that are trying to destabilize it.

4. Enhance legal worker programs to provide legal avenues of immigration that meet the needs of employers and immigrants and are a better option than illegal immigration. For instance, America needs a market-based temporary worker program that allows for a reliable source of labor provided by a dynamic and rotating temporary workforce. Such a program would serve to diminish the demand for illegal immigrants by allowing those who would normally enter the country illegally to come here legally, make money, and then return home. And it would serve the needs of the American economy.

5. Reform U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to handle legal immigration better. USCIS needs to be a more efficient and effective partner in providing the immigration services and enforcement that the nation needs. These reforms should include an entirely new funding model, a comprehensive overhaul of the agency’s service support enterprise, and better integration of USCIS programs with immigration enforcement and border control efforts. USCIS also needs to streamline the visa programs already in place (such as those aimed at temporary or seasonal agricultural workers).

6. Strengthen citizenship. Each nation has the responsibility—and obligation—to determine legal requirements for immigration, naturalization, and citizenship. Since the United States Constitution and laws passed by Congress have already established these requirements, there should be support for programs that promote civics and history education among immigrants and encourage English language proficiency in order to foster political integration and strengthen commitment to our common principles.

7. Incremental reform. Effective enforcement will not require Congress to pass a massive comprehensive bill, nor will it require a costly amnesty that would erode the rule of law and be patently unfair to legal immigrants. Reform needs to be incremental and designed to lessen the incentive for illegal immigration, while strengthening the capacity of employers to hire the employees they need to help the economy grow and prosper without jeopardizing the nation’s security, sovereignty, and social fabric.

FACTS AND FIGURES

The Bush Administration

- Increased the number of Border Patrol agents from 11,000 to 17,500;
- Added 661 miles of fencing and other tactical infrastructure at the border with Mexico;
- Rolled out and fine-tuned the first deployment of SBInet, a program initiated in 2006 as part of the Department of Homeland Security's Secure Border Initiative (SBI) that aided in the apprehension of almost 4,000 people attempting to cross the border illegally;
- Increased the number and use of unmanned aerial systems (UAS);
- Launched the ports of entry (POE) modernization project;
- Added 108 new radiation portal monitors at POEs, bringing the number to 1,127;
- Began the long-term development of the Coast Guard's Integrated Deepwater System Program intended to recapitalize Coast Guard equipment;
- Added 1,000 jurisdictions under the section 287(g) program, allowing state and local authorities the flexibility needed to make decisions without federal mandates and second-guessing;
- Began the E-Verify program, which has allowed 80,000 employers to verify the citizenship of prospective employees.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Jena Baker McNeill, "15 Steps to Better Border Security: Reducing America's Southern Exposure," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2245, March 9, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/bg2245.cfm>

Jena Baker McNeill and Matt A. Mayer, "Section 287(g) Revisions: Tearing Down State and Local Immigration Enforcement One Change at a Time," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2543, July 14, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm2543.cfm>

James Jay Carafano, "Homeland Security Department Guts Workplace Enforcement," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2535, July 10, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm2535.cfm>

Diem Nguyen, Matt A. Mayer, and James Jay Carafano, "Next Steps for Immigration Reform and Workplace Enforcement," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 2241, February 13, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Immigration/bg2241.cfm>

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