

How to Change Your Position on Immigration



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Maybe you voted against the comprehensive reform bill back in 2007. Or you've spoken out against the Gang of 8 bill in the past. Or you've insisted in a debate that any path to citizenship is equivalent to amnesty and you wouldn't support it. But you also know that our immigration system is dysfunctional, and doing nothing is no longer an option. You're not alone. Many policymakers and politicians have undertaken an evolution on immigration reform over the past few years—or even the past few months. And as they have demonstrated, there is a path to changing your public stance on the issue without undercutting your principles. This memo lays out three steps that can help those who once opposed comprehensive reform explain why they believe that now is the time to act.

1. Talk Toughness

We've made huge strides toward securing the border, and the bill passed by the Senate is the toughest in history.

Our country is in a very different place than we were the last time immigration reform was seriously debated by Congress. Today, the border is more secure than it has been at any point in history. It is currently protected by unmanned aerial vehicles, more than 20,000 border patrol agents, and 352 miles of pedestrian fencing. In fact, over the past five years we have already put in place nearly every single border security measure that was being demanded in exchange for reform in 2007.

And the Senate-passed bill would go substantially further. With the addition of the Corker-Hoeven border surge amendment, that legislation is tougher than any major reform bill in history. It would double the border patrol force and the total miles of pedestrian fencing, mandate E-Verify

nationwide, and establish a biometric entry/exit system for major ports of entry and exit. And it would require that every single one of these benchmarks is satisfied before a single undocumented immigrant can receive a green card.

Thousands of pieces of new technology would be deployed along the border, and a new strategy would be implemented to prevent illegal crossings over the U.S.-Mexico border.

In short, a vote for the Senate-passed bill is a vote for the most secure border in our nation's history.

2. Emphasize the Economic Effects

Our outdated system was built for a 20th century economy, and it's holding back our growth and competitiveness.

The Senate bill is not just an immigration bill—it's an economic growth bill. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the Senate bill would save the country \$135 billion in just the first decade (even taking into account the costs of the border surge) and increase GDP by 3.3%. In the second decade, the legislation would be expected to reduce federal budget deficits by \$685 billion and grow GDP by 5.4%.

By recasting our broken system to focus the future flow of immigration on the workers our economy needs, the Senate bill would ensure that America can compete in today's global service-based market. Instead of sending home the bright students we educate here or forcing farmers to rely on undocumented labor, the new bill would embrace international students and high-skilled immigrants in addition to family members of those already here and create sustainable agricultural and guest worker programs. And to ensure fairness to taxpayers, no undocumented immigrants will be eligible for any federal means-tested benefits unless and until they earn a green card—a process that will take at least a decade.

The Senate-passed bill is good for the economy, fair to taxpayers, and crucial for our country's growth and competitiveness.

3. Spotlight Support Across the Spectrum

The current reform effort has brought together a wide array of supporters from across industries and the political spectrum.

You won't be alone in supporting the bill. The country has come a long way on the issue, and 2013 has brought to bear the strongest coalition in support of reform ever seen in Washington. Religious leaders and organizations, from Evangelicals to the Catholic Church, have joined forces with labor, business, law enforcement, entrepreneurs, and people from across the country to support the Senate bill.

The bill's bipartisan 'Gang of 8' authors—Republican Senators McCain, Graham, Rubio, and Flake, and Democratic Senators Schumer, Durbin, Menendez, and Bennet—include leaders from both sides of the aisle who stand for widely divergent ideologies. And conservative Republican Senators Corker and Hoeven voted in favor of the bill, and brought along many of their colleagues, after they collaborated to further enhance the border security. By drafting a bill that is tough, fair, and practical, these leaders earned the support of 68 Senators, including 14 Republicans, as well as conservative pundits like Bill O'Reilly and Grover Norquist and organizations ranging from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to the Chamber of Commerce. Even the loudest reform opponents in Congress have now begun to voice support for a path to citizenship for DREAMers (undocumented immigrants brought here as children), and Majority Leader Eric Cantor has committed to co-authoring a bill which would grant it.

Both reality and the political landscape on immigration have significantly shifted since the last time Congress debated reform. Americans from across the country with diverse

perspectives now agree that our system is broken — unsustainable, unfair, and putting us at a disadvantage in the global marketplace. Many former opponents of reform have determined that inaction is no longer a viable option. Regardless of their positions in the past, those who want to ensure our immigration system is tough, fair, and practical can maintain those values and embrace the Senate-passed compromise as the best way of furthering them.

TOPICS

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