

What Comprehensive Immigration reform Means

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Americans and the citizens of Alabama want their leaders to tackle and solve issues that affect them. There is no denying that the immigration system is broken and in need of reform at the federal level. On May 20, 2009, President Obama announced that a bipartisan group of Senators and Congressional Representatives would meet on June 8 to discuss comprehensive immigration reform (CIR). Comprehensive immigration reform should create an immigration system that is orderly, workable and consistent with our nation's values. Now is the time to support CIR at the national level, not piece-meal state level legislation or local ordinances.

CIR must enhance our nation's security and safety. A sensible enforcement strategy will protect due process and human rights, make the most effective use of the tools and policies already available and be fiscally responsible. Enforcement actions would include the prosecution and removal of violent individuals, the prosecution of unscrupulous employers who exploit immigrant workers and eliminate human trafficking operations. Creating increased legal avenues for immigrant workers and their families would decrease the need for human smugglers and eliminate violent criminals who hide behind the lack of enforcement.

CIR must take a rational and humane approach. There are more than 12 million undocumented immigrants living in this country and it is unrealistic to believe that they can all be deported. Instead, an earned path to citizenship should be implemented. Undocumented immigrants working and living in the US should be submitted to background checks, required to pay appropriate fines and taxes. Those who satisfy these requirements should be permitted to apply for lawful permanent status leading to citizenship. Such a program is not amnesty, but a practical solution.

CIR must protect all U.S. and immigrant workers, specifically all workers' right to organize, bargain collectively and be provided occupational safety, health and anti-discrimination protections. This will ensure that immigration policies do not depress wages and working conditions and create incentives for unscrupulous employers to operate outside the legal system. Any employment verification system, such as E-Verify, should determine employment authorization accurately and efficiently while protecting workers and employers.

CIR must promote immigrant integration into America's communities. The continued decline in funding for English as a second language and civics classes undermines the goal of immigrant integration and creates frustration among individual communities and its citizens. This increased frustration has caused states and local governments to react with policies of isolation and division. Instead, the federal government must provide new immigrants, like it has done in the past, the opportunity to learn the English language and U.S. laws and support state and local governments' efforts to help integrate these new Americans.

Finally, CIR must protect the fundamental rights of all people. The Constitution guarantees due

process for all people in this country, regardless of status. However, the government has not fulfilled this guarantee and has fallen short in its treatment of immigrants. Congress must restore basic civil liberties for all individuals in this country and renew its commitment to core American values of fairness and justice.

Like most Americans, President Obama strongly supports a comprehensive solution that will reduce illegal immigration, respect hardworking immigrant families and reflect American values. Our nation's immigration system is broken and requires strong leadership and decisive action. Comprehensive immigration reform will reduce illegal immigration, strengthen the rule of law and help the nation's economic recovery. As Alabama and a nation, let's do the right thing and support CIR at the national level that will provide fair treatment and practical solutions that benefit us all.