



BACKGROUND

To embrace and uphold our tradition as a nation of immigrants.

Immigration Enforcement: What Has Been Tried? What Has Been The Result?

Some members of Congress clamor for increased immigration enforcement, as if this were a new idea. In fact, for the past twenty years, this country has been steadily increasing enforcement at the border, and the effort has not only failed, but backfired. More of the same will only mean more smugglers, more fake documents, more immigrants dying in the desert, and more communities left on their own to accommodate a growing underground workforce. The tougher enforcement measures enacted by Congress have had nothing to do with the reason immigrants are coming here illegally: there are too few legal channels for them to come here and take advantage of opportunities here to work and improve their lives. Only through a comprehensive approach combining a reform of our admission system, a realistic solution for the undocumented population living in the U.S., and targeted, effective enforcement of realistic laws will we gain control over our immigration system. Here is a look at what's been done.

Over the last 20 years, border enforcement has ballooned

- In 1986, the budget for the Border Patrol was \$151 million. By 2002, the Border Patrol budget had reached \$1.6 billion—a tenfold increase.¹
- Between 1986 and 2002, the number of hours agents spent patrolling the border grew by a factor of about eight.²
- By 2002 the Border Patrol was the largest arms-bearing branch of the U.S. government, excluding the military.³
- Building a fence along the entire southwest border would cost roughly \$9 billion—about \$2.5 billion more than the *total* budget of U.S. Customs and Border Protection in FY 2005.⁴

The border buildup has failed: Undocumented immigration has skyrocketed

- Despite a dramatic increase in border enforcement, each year from 1990 to 2004 there were between 480,000 and 660,000 undocumented immigrants settling in the U.S.⁵ In all, more than 9 million undocumented immigrants were added to our population since 1990.⁶
- The increase in border enforcement has led to an increase in the number of immigrants dying while crossing the border. From January 1995 through March 2004, more than 2,640 migrants died. In the last four years there has been on average more than one death per day.⁷ A record 460 migrants lost their lives this past year, according to the U.S. Border Patrol.⁸

Enforcement policies have backfired: We are spending more and succeeding less in controlling the border

- The cost of making an arrest along the border has increased from \$300 in 1992 to \$1,700 in 2002—an increase of 467% in a decade.⁹ (For perspective, the consumer price index rose approximately 28% during this period.)¹⁰

- Facing increased costs and danger in crossing the border, migrants who used to go back and forth across the border now stay longer. With the average length of stay longer, and the migrant flow across the border undiminished, the result has been a rapidly rising undocumented population in the U.S.¹¹

While border enforcement failure is most spectacularly evident, Congress has passed a number of measures aimed at making life difficult for immigrants inside the U.S., with the hope that these measures will help us gain control of the immigration system. These have also failed to stem the flow of undocumented immigrants.

The clampdown on immigrants has not been just on the border

- Congress has made it more difficult for someone fleeing persecution and trying to enter the country to gain a hearing on their asylum claim.¹² For those already in the U.S., Congress has made it more difficult for persons who fear persecution if sent back to their home countries to successfully gain asylum.¹³
- Congress has closed off avenues by which undocumented immigrants could adjust to legal status. New prohibitions against adjustment to legal status have been imposed on undocumented immigrants.¹⁴
- Changes to the law in 1996 and since then aimed to eliminate review of discretionary denials of relief from deportation; eliminate or greatly restrict review by the federal courts of deportation orders; eliminate review of detention decisions; and place other restrictions on the ability of immigrants to get a fair hearing in the courts.¹⁵

As the above statistics show, our ever increasing border buildup and enforcement policies have failed in the past. A look at who the undocumented are today, their ties to family and work in the U.S., and a look at the U.S. labor market needs, will give an idea of why a focus on enforcement-only will continue to fail.

The undocumented are putting down roots

- As of March 2005, 60% of undocumented immigrants—*approximately 7 million*—had been in the U.S. *more than five years*. Of that number, more than half had been here *more than 10 years*.¹⁶
- More than half of the undocumented are living in families—including couples with or without children.¹⁷
- In 2005, nearly 2 million families of unauthorized immigrants included U.S. citizen children.¹⁸

The undocumented are here to work and our economy depends on them

- Participation in the labor force is very high for undocumented immigrant men—94%. This compares with 83% for native-born men.¹⁹
- Undocumented immigrants account for nearly 5% of the entire U.S. labor force.²⁰ No one has calculated the cost of losing 5% of our labor force.
- Certain occupations have a very high concentration of undocumented workers. For example, approximately 25% or more of all drywall installers, meat and poultry workers, ground maintenance workers, and construction laborers are undocumented workers.²¹
- Only 4% of undocumented workers are employed in agriculture.²²

Deportation of the large undocumented population is not practical

- Deporting 8-9 million undocumented immigrants would cost more than \$200 billion over five years—more than double the annual budget of the entire Homeland Security Department.²³
- It would take 200,000 buses, bumper-to-bumper, in a convoy 1,700 miles long, to transport our undocumented immigrants to the border.²⁴

March 2006

End Notes

¹ <http://www.freetrade.org/pubs/pas/tpa-029.pdf>

² <http://www.freetrade.org/pubs/pas/tpa-029.pdf>

³ <http://www.freetrade.org/pubs/pas/tpa-029.pdf>

⁴ http://www.aif.org/ipc/policy_reports_2005_fencinginfailure.asp

⁵ <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/53.pdf>

⁶ <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=223>

⁸ <http://www.polisci.ucsd.edu/cornelius/latimes10-1-05.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.freetrade.org/pubs/pas/tpa-029.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>

¹¹ <http://www.freetrade.org/pubs/pas/tpa-029.pdf>

¹² http://www.abanet.org/publicserv/immigration/dp_Chapter2.pdf

¹³ http://www.abanet.org/publicserv/immigration/dp_Chapter4.pdf;

<http://www.immigrationforum.org/documents/PolicyWire/Legislation/REALIDsummary.pdf>

¹⁴ http://www.abanet.org/publicserv/immigration/dp_Chapter4.pdf

¹⁵ http://www.abanet.org/publicserv/immigration/dp_Chapter8.pdf;

<http://www.immigrationforum.org/documents/PolicyWire/Legislation/REALIDsummary.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>

²⁰ <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>

²¹ <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>

²² <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>

²³ http://www.americanprogress.org/atf/cf/%7BE9245FE4-9A2B-43C7-A521-5D6FF2E06E03%7D/DEPORTING_THE_UNDOCUMENTED.PDF

²⁴ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/07/AR2005100701701.html>