

When is Enough, Enough?

Meeting on Comprehensive Immigration Reform Ends with Call for More Enforcement

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Washington, D.C. - Following a meeting to discuss comprehensive immigration reform with Senate Republicans, President Obama announced that he would send 1,200 National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexico border and would request \$500 million for additional border personnel and technology as part of the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Bill.

As we have seen time and time again, efforts to overhaul the entire immigration system have taken a back seat to the political expediency of pouring more money into border enforcement. While it is clear that border violence must be addressed, it is also clear that enforcement alone is not a solution to our country's immigration problems.

Over the last two decades, the United States has spent billions of dollars on border enforcement. Since 1992, the annual budget of the U.S. Border Patrol has increased by 714 percent. At the same time, the number of Border Patrol agents stationed along the southwest border has grown by 390 percent. Interior enforcement has expanded as well, and detentions and deportations are at record levels. However, during the same time period, the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States has roughly tripled from 3.5 million in 1990 to 11.9 million in 2008. Yet close family members of American families continue to wait in visa backlogs that routinely last 5 to 7 years, and America's competitiveness in the global market place is challenged by difficulties recruiting and retaining exceptional foreign workers.

The President stated that the goal of the additional resources is to quell the violence along the border. While many are frustrated by the continued funding of border enforcement activity to the exclusion of other issues, the only bright side is that this approach seems to acknowledge that the real sources of violence and crime along the border are not immigrants but drug cartels and gun trafficking.

"Those Members of Congress who have insisted on 'border enforcement first' for years must now acknowledge that we are pouring ample resources into enforcement and must be prepared to move on to step two-comprehensive immigration reform," stated Ben Johnson, Executive Director of the American Immigration Council. "We need to address the root causes of illegal immigration and create a functional legal immigration system for the 21st century. The American people are hungry for real reform. We can no longer wait for politicians to squeeze every last political point out of this issue; we need real leadership that is focused on solutions, not headlines."

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