

THE WHITE HOUSE

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Comprehensive Immigration Reform: Securing Our Border, Enforcing Our Laws, And Upholding Our Values

Today's Presidential Action

Today, President Bush Attended A Naturalization Ceremony And Discussed His Vision For **Comprehensive Immigration Reform**. The President supports comprehensive immigration reform to secure our border, improve enforcement of our laws, and uphold our values. The President also discussed his proposal for a temporary worker program that rejects amnesty, allows foreign workers to fill jobs no American is willing to do, and reduces smuggling and crime at the border.

- **America's Immigrant Heritage Continues To Shape Our Society.** Our Nation is bound together by liberty and a conviction that all people are created with equal dignity and value. Through the generations, Americans have upheld that vision by welcoming new citizens from across the globe. Immigrants have helped shape our identity and sustain our economy.
- **The President Strongly Believes America Is Stronger And More Dynamic When New Citizens Are Welcomed.** The President has called on Congress to increase the number of green cards that can lead to citizenship. He supports increasing the number of visas available for foreign-born workers in highly skilled fields. The President signed legislation creating a new Office of Citizenship at the Department of Homeland Security to promote knowledge of citizenship rights and procedures; the Office of Citizenship created a new official guide for immigrants, and the Administration is working with faith-based and community groups to offer civics and English-language courses. In July 2002, the President signed an Executive Order making foreign-born members of our military immediately eligible for citizenship. Over the past four years, more than 20,000 men and women in uniform have become citizens.
- **Every New Citizen Makes A Lifelong Pledge To Support The Values And Laws Of America.** New citizens have an obligation to learn the customs and values that define our Nation – including liberty and civic responsibility, equality under God, tolerance for others, and the English language.

The President Welcomes A Civil And Dignified Debate On Comprehensive Immigration Reform. Congress is now considering immigration reform proposals. Immigration is an emotional topic, and we need to maintain our perspective as we conduct this debate.

To Keep The Promise Of America, We Must Enforce The Laws Of America

President Bush's Proposal For Comprehensive Immigration Reform Includes Three Critical Elements – Securing The Border, Strengthening Enforcement Inside The Country, And Creating A Temporary Worker Program. These elements depend on and reinforce one another. Together, they will give America an immigration system that meets 21st century demands.

The First Element Is Securing Our Border. Since President Bush took office, funding for border security has increased by 66 percent. The Border Patrol has been expanded to more than 12,000 agents, an increase of more than 2,700 agents, or nearly 30 percent. The President's FY07 budget funds another 1,500 new agents. Agents are being provided with cutting-edge technology like infrared cameras, advanced motion sensors, and unmanned aerial vehicles. Protective infrastructure, such as vehicle barriers and fencing in urban areas, is being installed. Manpower, technology, and infrastructure are being integrated in more unified ways than ever before.

- **The Administration's Border Security Strategy Is Getting Results.** Since President Bush took office, agents have apprehended and sent home more than 6 million people entering the country illegally – including more than 400,000 with criminal records. Federal, State, local, and tribal law enforcement are working together. More than 600,000 illegal immigrants were apprehended through the Arizona Border Control Initiative last year – an increase of more than 50 percent increase over the previous year. The men and women of our Border Patrol have made good progress – but we have much more work ahead, and we will not be satisfied until our agents have full control of our border.
- **The Administration Is Ending The Practice Of "Catch And Release."** The President has set a goal to end "catch and release" over the next year. Most illegal immigrants from Mexico can be returned to Mexico within 24 hours. Non-Mexican illegal immigrants present a different challenge. For decades, government detention facilities did not have enough beds for the non-Mexican illegal immigrants caught at the border – so most were released back into society. They were each assigned a court date, but virtually no one showed up. The Administration is ending the practice of "catch and release" by increasing the number of beds in detention facilities by 12 percent this year; the President's FY07 budget proposes increasing that number by another 32 percent. The Administration is expanding the use of "expedited removal," which allows us to send non-Mexican illegal immigrants home more quickly.
- **We Are Making Progress In This Effort.** Last year, it took an average of 66 days to process a non-Mexican illegal immigrant. Now, the process is taking only 21 days. This has helped us end "catch and release" for illegal immigrants from Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua caught crossing our Southwest border. Since last summer, the total number of non-Mexican illegal immigrants released into society has been cut by more than a third. There is more work ahead, and the Administration will work with Congress to close loopholes that make it difficult to process illegal immigrants from certain countries and will continue pressing foreign governments like China to take back their citizens who enter our country illegally.

The Second Element Is Strengthening Enforcement Of Our Laws In The Interior Of Our Country. Since President Bush took office, funding for immigration enforcement has increased by 42 percent. These resources have helped agents bring to justice smugglers, terrorists, gang members, and human traffickers. For example, through Operation Community Shield, Federal agents have arrested nearly 2,300 gang members who were in America illegally, including violent criminals like the members of the "MS-13" gang.

- **Better Interior Enforcement Requires Better Worksite Enforcement.** Last year, President Bush signed legislation to more than double the resources dedicated to worksite enforcement. Next month, the Administration will launch new law enforcement task forces in 11 cities to dismantle document fraud rings.

The Third Element Is Creating A New Temporary Worker Program That Would Not Provide Amnesty. A temporary worker program would make the system more rational, orderly, and secure by providing a legal way to match willing foreign workers with willing American employers to fill jobs that no American is willing to do. Workers would be able to register for legal status on a temporary basis. If workers decided to apply for citizenship, they would have to get in line. This program would help meet the demands of our growing economy and allow honest workers to provide for their families while respecting the law.

- **A Temporary Worker Program Is Vital To Securing The Border.** Creating a separate, legal channel for those entering America to do an honest day's labor would dramatically reduce the number of people attempting to sneak back and forth across the border. That would help take pressure off the border and free up law enforcement to focus on the greatest threats to our security – terrorists, drug dealers, and other criminals. The program would also improve security by creating tamper-proof identification cards that would allow authorities to keep track of every temporary worker who is in America on a legal basis and help authorities identify those who are here illegally.
- **A Temporary Worker Program Should Not Provide Amnesty.** Granting amnesty unfairly allows those who break the law to jump ahead of people who play by the rules and wait in the citizenship line. Amnesty would also encourage future waves of illegal immigration, increase pressure on the border, and make it more difficult for law enforcement to focus on those who mean us harm. For the sake of justice and the sake of border security, the President firmly opposes amnesty.

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