

On the U.S. Senate's Passage of Immigration Reform Legislation

Today, the United States Senate took an historic step towards making the dream of millions of immigrants a reality and aligning U.S. immigration law with our values of upholding justice and rewarding hard work. By a vote of 68 to 32, including 14 Republicans, the Senate passed the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013 (S.744), moving us closer to the first comprehensive reform of our nation's immigration laws in decades.

The bill gives 11 million immigrants a chance at citizenship, even though that road is a long and hard one. It offers protection for whistleblowers, equal access to remedies for violations of workers' rights, and accelerated paths to citizenship for farmworkers and DREAMers. Its significance for working families cannot be overstated: Immigrants who gain legal status will also gain the ability to enforce core labor rights without fear of retaliation and deportation. For the first time, many will be able to stand up and demand the right to fair wages and protection against employment discrimination, and gain the real ability to join with other workers to improve their wages and working conditions. Newly legalized workers will see their wages increase by 15 percent and their poverty rates decline.

But immigration reform is not only good for immigrant workers, it's good for our economy. Economists across the political spectrum agree that bringing millions of workers out of the shadows will stimulate the economy and produce more jobs for everyone, as businesses invest and expand. Projections are that the economy will see as many as 900,000 new jobs. The bi-partisan Congressional Budget Office concludes that, over time, the immigration bill will add six million positions to the U.S. job market by 2023 and nine million by 2033 – increasing the labor force by five percent.

Even as we applaud the Senate for this historic action, however, we must recognize the deep flaws in the Senate bill. It is deeply troubling that the bill now contains \$46 billion to fund a needless "border surge," nearly doubling the size of the Border Patrol. We already spend more on border security than on the FBI, DEA, Secret Service, and U.S. Marshalls combined. We already have enough agents to place one every 500 feet along the border. The "border surge" is overkill, and a tragic waste of resources in a country reeling from the twin effects of recession and sequestration.

As the immigration bill moves through Congress, NELP will continue to defend its core elements, work to make it better for working people, and fight against damaging amendments that move our country in the wrong direction. In the meantime, we congratulate the Senate for taking this important step forward to ensure that America's immigration laws reflect our shared values of justice, equal rights and equal opportunity for all.

The National Employment Law Project is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts research and advocates on issues affecting low-wage and unemployed workers. For more about NELP, visit www.nelp.org

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