

Improving Border Security And Immigration

The Administration Continues Its Efforts To Strengthen Border Security, Improve Interior And Worksite Enforcement, Streamline Existing Guest Worker Programs, And Help New Americans Assimilate

Tonight, President Bush will review the steps his Administration is taking to improve our border security and address immigration challenges. America's broken immigration system is a major problem that the American people expect their elected leaders to solve. Although Congress has not passed legislation to address the immigration challenges our Nation faces, the Administration continues to build upon progress we have already made in strengthening border security, enforcing our worksite laws, keeping our economy well-supplied with vital workers, and helping new Americans assimilate into our society. Yet the President will also urge that in order to take the pressure off the border, we need a new way for foreign workers to come here lawfully, on a temporary basis, and support our economy.

The Administration Is Strengthening Border Security With Additional Personnel, Technology And Infrastructure

The Administration has increased funding for border security and immigration enforcement by 159 percent, including emergency funds, since the President took office - from \$4.8 billion in 2001 to \$12.3 billion in 2008.

The Administration has expanded the Border Patrol from approximately 9,000 agents in 2001 to more than 15,000 agents today. By the end of 2008, we will have more than 18,000 agents, doubling the size of the Border Patrol under the President's leadership.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is on track to complete 370 miles of pedestrian fencing along the southwest border by the end of calendar year 2008. As of this month, we have completed a total of 165 miles of pedestrian fence along the southwest border, giving us a total of 290 miles of pedestrian and vehicle fence already in place at the border. We expect to have 670 total miles of pedestrian and vehicle fence by the end of 2008, and have begun obtaining land to make this a reality.

The Administration is including a new Southwest Border Enforcement Initiative in its 2009 Budget. This comprehensive Justice Department initiative will provide \$100 million to help address the rise in crime and immigration cases on the southwest border. It will increase our ability to arrest, detain, prosecute, and house violent criminals, drug offenders, and immigration violators along the southwest border.

DHS is operating three Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) along the southern border in support of border security operations. An additional UAS is scheduled to be operational this year.

DHS saw a reduction of 20 percent in apprehensions of illegal aliens at the Southern border in Fiscal Year 2007. This is an indication that stronger border security and enforcement efforts have deterred aliens from attempting to cross the border illegally.

The Administration has effectively ended the policy of "catch and release" and now detains all removable aliens caught trying to cross the border until they can be removed. For years, limited detention space forced the release of many illegal border crossers from nations other than Mexico with nothing more than a Notice to Appear for a hearing before an immigration judge. Many aliens ignored these notices and instead blended into U.S. society. The Administration has effectively ended this policy of "catch and release" and replaced it with a policy of "catch and return," ensuring that all removable aliens caught trying to cross the border illegally are held until they can be removed.

The Administration will end the decades old practice of allowing U.S. and Canadian citizens to enter the country at our land and sea ports of entry with merely an oral declaration of identity and citizenship. Beginning January 31, 2008, all cross-border travelers must present documents establishing their identity and citizenship. This is a precursor to the Congressionally mandated full implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative in June of 2009, at which time passports or similarly secure documents will be required by all travelers.

The Administration Is Continuing To Enhance Interior And Worksite Enforcement

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has replaced the old approach of administrative hearings and fines for employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens with a much tougher combination of criminal prosecutions and asset forfeitures.

- Arrests for criminal violations brought in worksite enforcement actions have increased from 19 in FY 2001 to 863 in FY 2007 – a more than 45-fold increase. ICE also made 4,077 administrative arrests in FY 2007, for a total of 4,940 arrests.
- In FY 2007, DHS obtained more than \$31 million in criminal fines, restitutions and civil judgments as a result of worksite enforcement.

E-Verify is helping more than 48,000 companies verify the employment eligibility of newly hired employees. The number of companies enrolled in E-Verify has more than quadrupled in 16 months, now representing almost 200,000 business locations. Currently, 2,000 employers are being added each week. More than 3.7 million new hires were processed through E-Verify last year alone. As more States like Arizona require local businesses to use E-Verify, and the Federal government begins to require Federal contractors to enroll in the program, it will become increasingly difficult for those here illegally to find work, greatly weakening the magnet that draws so many people to enter the country illegally. In addition, E-Verify is a valuable tool in detecting immigration fraud and identity theft.

DHS has issued a "No-Match" Employment Eligibility Verification regulation to help employers ensure their workers are legal and help the Government identify and crack down on employers who knowingly hire illegal workers. Unfortunately, this useful regulation is being held up by litigation. We expect a revised rule to be finalized and in effect this year.

In FY 2007, U.S. Customs and Border Protection and ICE returned or removed almost 1.2 million illegal aliens from the United States.

ICE has increased its enforcement efforts:

- Since 2005, ICE has quintupled the number of teams devoted to removing fugitive aliens from the U.S. – from 15 Fugitive Operations Teams in 2005 to 75 of these seven-member teams by the end of FY 2007.
- ICE has helped keep our communities safe by arresting 3,302 gang members and their associates in FY 2007.
- ICE has expanded its Criminal Alien Program to identify incarcerated criminal aliens. In FY 2007, ICE identified for removal 164,296 criminals who were incarcerated in Federal, state and local facilities.

The Administration is training hundreds of State and local law enforcement officers to address illegal immigration in their communities. The Administration is maintaining the 287(g) program, which allows State and local officers to enforce immigration law, and expanding other measures that help State and local law enforcement officials. These measures include a broad array of enforcement tools, such as formal task forces, greater use of the ICE Law Enforcement Support Center, and enhanced partnerships to address location-specific threats, such as gangs. The Administration is proposing an increase in funding for this program in its 2009 Budget.

The Administration Is Streamlining Existing Guest-Worker Programs To Help Keep Our Economy Well-Supplied With Vital Workers

The Department of Labor (DOL) and DHS are prepared to unveil a rule that would modernize the H-2A agricultural seasonal worker program to better provide farmers with an orderly and timely flow of legal workers, while protecting the rights of laborers. No sector of the American economy requires a legal flow of foreign workers more than agriculture, which is experiencing labor shortages.

DOL is also working on regulations streamlining the H-2B Program for non-agricultural seasonal workers.

DHS and DOL are studying potential administrative reforms to visa programs for highly skilled workers.

The Administration Is Taking Steps To Help New Americans Assimilate In Order To Keep Our Nation United

In September 2007, the DHS Office of Citizenship announced a revised naturalization test emphasizing the fundamental concepts of American democracy, basic U.S. history, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. This test is ensuring fairness by eliminating the wide variations in testing quality between regional offices that plagued the former system.

The Office of Citizenship is also providing additional training for volunteers and adult educators who lead immigrants through the naturalization process.

The Education Department is working on a free, Web-based portal to help immigrants learn English. Knowledge of English is the most important component of assimilation.