

Fixing what's broken

Written by President Barack Obama
Monday, 16 May 2011 16:07

I went to El Paso, Texas, today to lay out a plan to do something big: fix America's broken immigration system.

It's an issue that affects you, whether you live in a border town like El Paso or not. Our immigration system reflects how we define ourselves as Americans -- who we are, who we will be -- and continued inaction poses serious costs for everyone.

Those costs are human, felt by millions of people here and abroad who endure years of separation or deferred dreams -- and millions more hardworking families whose wages are depressed when employers wrongly exploit a cheap source of labor. That's why immigration reform is also an economic imperative -- an essential step needed to strengthen our middle class, create new industries and new jobs, and make sure America remains competitive in the global economy.

Because this is such a tough problem -- one that politicians in Washington have been either exploiting or dodging, depending on the politics -- this change has to be driven by people like you.

Washington won't act unless you lead.

So if you're willing to do something about this critical issue, join our call for immigration reform now. Those who do will be part of our campaign to educate people on this issue and build the critical mass needed to make Washington act:

<http://my.barackobama.com/Immigration-Reform>

In recent years, concerns about whether border security and enforcement were tough enough were among the greatest impediments to comprehensive reform. They are legitimate issues that needed to be addressed -- and over the past two years, we have made great strides in enhancing security and enforcement.

We have more boots on the ground working to secure our southwest border than at any time in our history. We're going after employers who knowingly break the law. And we are deporting those who are here illegally. I know the increase in deportations has been a source of controversy, but I want to emphasize that we are focusing our limited resources on violent offenders and people convicted of crimes -- not families or people looking to scrape together an income.

So we've addressed the concerns raised by those who have stood in the way of progress in the past. And now that we have, it's time to build an immigration system that meets our 21st-century economic needs and reflects our values both as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.

Today, we provide students from around the world with visas to get engineering and computer science degrees at our top universities. But then our laws discourage them from using those skills to start a business or a new industry here in the United States. That just doesn't make sense.

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We also need to stop punishing innocent young people for the actions of their parents -- and pass the DREAM Act so they can pursue higher education or become military service members in the country they know as home. We already know enormous economic benefits from the steady stream of talented and hardworking people coming to America. More than a century and a half ago, U.S. Steel's Andrew Carnegie was a 13-year-old brought here from Scotland by his family in search of a better life. And in 1979, a Russian family seeking freedom from Communism brought a young Sergey Brin to America -- where he would become a co-founder of Google.

Through immigration, we've become an engine of the global economy and a beacon of hope, ingenuity and entrepreneurship. We should make it easier for the best and brightest not only to study here, but also to start businesses and create jobs here. That's how we'll win the future.

Immigration is a complex issue that raises strong feelings. And as we push for long-overdue action, we're going to hear the same sort of ugly rhetoric that has delayed reform for years -- despite long and widespread recognition that our current system fails us all and hurts our economy.

So you and I need to be the ones talking about this issue in the language of hope, not fear -- in terms of how we are made stronger by our differences, and can be made stronger still.

Take a moment now to watch my El Paso speech and join this campaign for change:

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