

# WALL STREET JOURNAL

## Bipartisan Path to Immigration Reform

By John McCain and Charles E. Schumer  
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This week, we join a bipartisan group of six senators to introduce comprehensive immigration-reform legislation. This is the first step in what will be a very difficult but achievable process to fix the nation's broken immigration system once and for all. The legislation's approach is balanced: It is firm in cracking down on illegal immigration but sensible when it comes to legal immigration.

Our group's effort included the active participation of some of the most conservative and liberal members of the Senate. We engaged in hundreds of hours of very tough negotiations, which nearly broke down at several points. But we forged consensus and now stand ready for an open, transparent process to move this issue forward in Congress.

Like all genuinely bipartisan efforts, this bill is a compromise. It will not please everyone, and no one got everything they wanted. The legislation we introduce on Tuesday has more support than any past effort. In a time of deep partisanship in Washington, groups that have been at loggerheads on a range of issues for years—from the AFL-CIO to the Chamber of Commerce, from the United Farm Workers to the American Farm Bureau Federation—have come together to support our bill.

This legislation is truly comprehensive. It would provide a credible way for undocumented immigrants to apply for legalization and eventually citizenship—but only after specific, achievable steps have been taken, including securing our southern border with the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles and other proven surveillance capabilities. We believe that Americans will accept a common-sense approach to the 11 million undocumented immigrants who are here now, and to prospective legal immigrants, provided that there will be no future waves of illegal immigration.

Just last month, during a trip we took to the Arizona-Mexico border, we saw for ourselves not only how much progress our country has made in securing the border but also the enormous challenges that remain. These challenges took on a human face when, only yards from us in downtown Nogales, Ariz., a young woman climbed an 18-foot border fence right before our eyes, crossing into the U.S. before being quickly apprehended. On border security, our bill would set a necessarily high standard for ensuring that high-risk areas of the border meet specific metrics of control and surveillance, and provide the resources and technology the Border Patrol needs to improve how it detects and apprehends illegal entries.

We took great pains to make certain that the mistakes of the 1986 reform effort will not be repeated. So another critical provision of our bill requires a nationwide electronic employment-verification system that will end the hiring of future undocumented workers. Let's not forget that approximately 40% of immigrants here illegally originally came to the U.S. legally but overstayed their visas. Coupled with increased fines on employers who knowingly hire illegal workers, the employment-verification system we propose will effectively deter and prevent illegal workers from coming into the country.

Our bill would also establish practical legal channels for workers to enter the U.S. to perform jobs for which there are no American applicants. This new program will make sure that America continues to stay globally competitive by attracting the world's best and brightest, and by providing a way for America's employers to gain access the labor that they desperately need.

Finally, at the center of our negotiations was how to deal with the approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. The status quo is unsustainable. The nation's failure to fix its broken immigration system has created what is, in reality, de facto amnesty. Our bill would establish a tough but fair system for millions of people living in the shadows to come forward and settle their debt to society by fulfilling reasonable requirements to become law-abiding citizens.

These requirements include a criminal-background check; paying a fine and back taxes; learning English; and going to the back of the line to wait for the privilege of applying for American citizenship. In this way, we balance America's heritage as a nation of immigrants with the imperative of upholding the rule of law. When these formerly illegal immigrants become law-abiding members of society, it will improve their lives and the lives of their families—and it will strengthen the nation and the U.S. economy.

A healthy, functioning immigration system is vital to securing the integrity of America's sovereign borders, advancing our economic growth, and protecting human dignity. We believe our legislation represents a responsible, humane and enduring solution to the problem of the millions who are here illegally while continuing to attract and assimilate some of the most skilled talent the world has to offer—but only if we also make good on broken promises to secure U.S. borders and enforce the law. We look forward to the bill's full and fair consideration in both houses of Congress.