

Immigration reform bill still denies basic rights

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Washington, DC - The bipartisan "Gang of Eight" senators just released a proposal for "comprehensive immigration reform."

But the "comprehensive immigration reform" on offer serves to legally deprive undocumented immigrants of fundamental civil rights — in spite of their outsized contributions to the U.S. economy.

The basic plan from the Gang of Eight has not changed much since the last time Washington showed an interest in immigration reform, in 2007.

It starts with stern promises to "secure the border." A guest worker program would follow.

The Gang of Eight proposal would enable undocumented immigrant workers to remain here legally after a criminal background check, a hefty registration fee, and a number of other onerous requirements.

The last piece of the puzzle is a so-called "path to citizenship," a procedure that would allow immigrants to become citizens — after paying back-taxes and fines, waiting several years, learning English, and jumping through countless bureaucratic hoops.

Such a procedure may sound reasonable to the millionaires' club that is the [U.S. Senate](#). But this reform blueprint simply cements the status of immigrants as marginalized members of U.S. society.

Consider the obsession among lawmakers with "border security." Hardliners like Sen. John Cornyn, T-TX, have called for "operational control" of the border before even considering legal status.

But the federal government has already achieved many of the border-security benchmarks at the heart of the Senate's immigration debate six years ago.

Currently, there are 1,000 more border patrol agents than the 2007 target stipulated. The feds have less than seven miles of fencing to install to reach that six-year-old target. And the government is using unmanned drones to police the border.

But to anti-immigrant zealots, the border can never be secure enough.

A path to citizenship that only opens once the "border is secure" is a path that will never open at all.

Further, border-security fetishists must have missed the fact that President [Obama](#) has already taken the concept to a whole new level.

The president oversaw a record 1.5 million deportations in his first term.

His administration has also cracked down on employers who hire undocumented workers. Workplace raids have quadrupled since 2008.

The president shares the Senate's desire to force undocumented immigrants through a bureaucratic rigmarole just to apply for citizenship. Under his rubric, they'd have to wait 13 years to become citizens.

Such waits consigns undocumented immigrants to permanent underclass status — status that is not in line with what they do for the U.S. economy.

The Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy estimates households headed by undocumented workers contributed \$11.2 billion in taxes in 2010. These taxes often fund social services that, as non-citizens, undocumented immigrants can't take advantage of.

Consider Social Security. The program's chief actuary estimates that undocumented workers and their employers paid \$15 billion into Social Security in 2010 alone. These individuals don't have legitimate Social Security numbers — so they have no expectation of claiming any of the taxes they pay into the program.

According to the [Brookings Institution](#)'s Hamilton Project, "immigrants raise the overall standard of living on U.S. workers by boosting wages and lowering prices." Low-skill immigrant labor actually complements the work of more highly skilled workers. That dynamic increases productivity.

Further, immigrants are proven job creators. They're 30 percent more likely to start a business than those born in the United States. And immigrants with advanced degrees are three times more likely to file a patent than native-born citizens.

The United States' 11.5 million undocumented immigrants deserve better than supposed "comprehensive reform" that denies them basic civil rights and casts them into a state of citizenship purgatory.

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