



Fact Sheet

BYRON L. DORGAN
CHAIRMAN

DPC Staff Contact: Kate Oh and Erika Moritsugu (202) 224-3232

DPC Press Contact: Barry Piatt (202) 224-0577

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On Your Side: Democrats Working Toward Tough, Fair, and Practical Solutions to Fix Our Immigration System

When it comes to immigration, the contrast is clear: Democrats are committed to comprehensive immigration reform that is tough, fair, and practical, but Republicans are only interested in playing politics and blocking progress.

Democrats are fighting for reform that will secure our borders, impose tough sanctions on employers who hire illegal immigrants and require immigrants here illegally to pay taxes, learn English, pass criminal background checks, and go to the back of the line – or face deportation.

Democrats have been working throughout the 109th, 110th, and 111th Congresses to enact such reform while in stark contrast, Republicans have repeatedly shown only a commitment to obstructionism and a pattern of offering unworkable, irresponsible, and harmful proposals that will never fix our broken immigration system.

Despite Republican obstruction, Democrats have achieved significant gains in securing our borders and reducing illegal immigration.

Senate Democrats Leading the Way on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Democrats recognize that ultimately our broken immigration system cannot be corrected without a comprehensive overhaul. We must strictly enforce our immigration laws, secure our borders, get tough on those here illegally, keep families together, and impose sanctions on employers who abuse immigrants and use them to undercut the wages of American workers. At the same time, we must not forget that we are a nation founded on and built by immigrants, whose contributions have always been crucial to America's prosperity and will continue to be vital to our nation's success.

This April, Senators **Reid, Durbin, Schumer, Feinstein**, and **Menendez** announced a new legislative framework, based on bipartisan negotiations that had taken place to date, to tackle the great challenges in our current immigration system. [REPAIR Proposal, [April 2010](#)]

Instead of focusing on a border-enforcement only strategy, which cannot repair the broken system by itself, the new framework would take a multifaceted approach to cover the full range of problems. The plan has four basic pillars:

- 1) Strengthening border security and interior enforcement of the law;
- 2) Requiring employers to use biometric Social Security-type cards to ensure proof of eligibility for employment;
- 3) Reforming the legal immigration system to encourage the best and brightest to come to the United States to contribute to our economy and to reunite families; and
- 4) Requiring undocumented immigrants to register, pass background checks, pay fines and back taxes, and apply for permanent residency.

These components work together to ensure that our immigration system adequately and effectively solves the multitude of problems that have led to the current failures.

In contrast, the Republican alternative to focus solely on border security, to the exclusion of other needed components of reform, is ineffective and irresponsible. GOP demands for mass deportation are impractical and unrealistic as well. It would be fiscally and physically impossible to try to round up and remove the estimated 11 million individuals living in the United States with no legal status. These Republican proposals are talking points and empty rhetoric, not serious policy solutions.

The DREAM Act: Securing a Return on America's Investment in Immigrant Students

As a down payment toward comprehensive immigration reform, Senate Democrats sought to pass the *Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act* (DREAM Act) as an amendment to the *Defense Authorization Act* (**S. 3454**). Unfortunately, every Republican voted against even allowing the Senate to proceed to considering the defense bill, preventing the *DREAM Act* from being offered as an amendment. This procedural vote was defeated by a vote of 56 to 43 on September 21, 2010. [Roll Call Vote [238](#)]

The *DREAM Act* would bring accountability to a tragic failure of the immigration system that often prevents young undocumented immigrants, who were brought to the U.S. as young children through no fault of their own, from pursuing higher education, military service, or many of the advanced professions. It simply does not make economic sense or serve the national interest to allow their potential to be wasted in this manner. The *DREAM Act* would rectify this problem for a small select group of talented young people, thereby allowing the nation to fully tap their tremendous promise.

Military experts also support the *DREAM Act* as an effective way to bolster our national security. Contrary to the objections of Republicans, the Defense Authorization bill was the appropriate vehicle for the *DREAM Act* because tens of thousands of highly-qualified, well-educated young people would enlist in the Armed Forces if the *DREAM Act* becomes law. [[Dept. of Defense](#)]

In a sign of hypocrisy and obstructionism, current GOP opponents include former champions of the *DREAM Act*. In fact, Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch authored the legislation in 2001 and led efforts to pass it. [*Washington Independent*, [9/16/10](#); ThinkProgress, [9/22/10](#)] When the legislation received a Senate vote in 2007, twelve Republicans voted to support it; all of those Republicans who still serve in the Senate switched their vote to “no” this September. [Roll Call Vote [394](#)] Although Republicans cited complaints about arcane procedures as their excuse for blocking the *DREAM Act* this September, the bottom line is that they were following the GOP pattern of obstructing debate on policies important to the American people. Indeed, 70 percent of Americans across party lines support the *DREAM Act*. [First Focus, [9/22/10](#)]

Progress Achieved in Securing America’s Borders and Reducing Illegal Immigration

While our entire immigration system requires reform and border security is not the only issue, Democrats continue working to ensure our borders are secure and to protect our national security. In recent years, we have made great progress in securing the nation’s borders and curtailing the flow of illegal immigration.

These achievements include a doubling of the number of Border Patrol agents, from 10,000 in 2004 to 20,000 today. According to the Department of Homeland Security, “Today, the Border Patrol is better staffed than at any time in its 86-year history.” [Dept. of Homeland Security, [9/1/10](#)] Over 600 miles of fencing along the southern border have also been completed. Record numbers of illegal immigrants have been deported as well, and the Obama Administration is cracking down on businesses for hiring undocumented workers. [*Washington Post*, [7/26/10](#)] Most recently, Congress provided \$600 million in additional funding in the 2010 Emergency Border Security Supplemental Appropriations Bill to enhance border security, including funding for more Border Patrol agents, Customs and Border Protection officers, Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel, and two new unmanned aerial vehicles to monitor the border. [*Reuters*, [8/13/10](#)]

Partly as a result of these stronger border security and enforcement efforts, the number of illegal immigrants entering our country has decreased by two-thirds, and, for the first time in 20 years, there has been a significant decline in the number of illegal immigrants living in our country. [Pew Hispanic Center, [9/1/10](#)] Due to Democratic leadership on border security, the number of people illegally attempting to cross our border has also dramatically decreased by over 75 percent from its peak during the Bush administration. [Dept. of Homeland Security]

Senate Democrats Are On Your Side: Steadfastly Committed to Truly Fixing Our Broken Immigration System

America’s immigration system remains broken. Inadequate pathways to legal immigration and ineffective law enforcement have contributed to millions of people living and working inside the United States without authorization, harming both American workers and undocumented immigrants. This is unacceptable.

Not only is the American public demanding decisive action on this issue, the emerging patchwork of state and local laws attempting to deal with the illegal immigration problem is unworkable, dangerous, and will not fix the problem. This situation highlights the urgent need for leadership by the federal government. Immigration is a federal responsibility, and the time to act to fix our broken immigration system is now.

Unfortunately, Republicans continue to deny the nation decisive action on comprehensive immigration reform in favor of the broken status quo. By blocking the *DREAM Act*, the GOP refuses to take even narrow, common-sense first steps toward a comprehensive solution. As a result, Republicans are leaving our country with the same problems that have plagued our immigration system for years. The American people, including those in the Latino community, deserve better. That is why Democrats will continue fighting for change to enact tough, fair, and practical immigration reform that our country so desperately needs. But because Senate GOP support is now necessary to advance any such legislation, our invitation to Republicans to work together still stands.