

WHY WE NEED TO SUPPORT THE SENATE IMMIGRATION BILL

The debate over the most sweeping reform to our nation's immigration system is about to get real.

Last month, the 18 bi-partisan members of the Senate Judicial Committee voted to send the immigration reform bill to the floor of the Senate. Last week, the senate voted to limit debate and consider amendments to the bill. More than 300 amendments--ranging from the good, the bad and the downright terrible--have been proposed by Democrats and Republicans. Not all these amendments will be offered for a vote though - some will be combined and some will not be raised at all.

Here are 6 reasons why we need to support the immigration reform bill today

1. We have been waiting for this opportunity for a long time.

For the first time in years, we have a real chance to modernize our immigration and enforcement systems; keep families together and put 11 million aspiring Americans on a dignified roadmap to citizenship. If this bill becomes law, undocumented immigrants can finally come out of the shadows and fully participate in our economy and our democracy--and future immigrants can come here legally.

2. A path to citizenship.

The bill provides an achievable path to citizenship for 11 million aspiring citizens who are currently undocumented.

If you're an undocumented immigrant who arrived in the United States before Dec. 31, 2011, haven't committed a felony, have a job, and pay a \$500 fine and back taxes, you will immediately gain the status of "registered provisional" under this law. This measure will allow undocumented individuals to legally stay in the U.S. without fear or risk of deportation.

Ten years after being granted "registered provisional" status, applications for permanent residency would be allowed to start. In total the recognition-to-citizenship process would take a total of 13 years and require approximately \$2,000 in fines from each adult affected.

3. Keeping families together.

The bill contains provisions to reunite families separated by immigration detention and deportation.

Approximately 23 percent of deportees have U.S. citizen children, many of whom end up in foster care upon separation from their mothers and fathers. The bill contains provisions to reunite families separated by immigration detention and deportation. Immigrants with children, spouses and/or parents who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents would be eligible to petition to return to the U.S. to be with their families. They would apply for Registered Provisional Immigrant status, or RPI, the 10-year visa that can then lead citizenship.

Keeping families together is the humane and right thing to do.

4. The DREAMers and farm workers are protected.

The commonsense immigration reform bill includes a broad version of the DREAM Act. It would create a faster five-year path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who came to the country before the age of 16.

The DREAM Act provisions include no upper age limits for applicants. To qualify for a speedier path to citizenship, DREAMers who entered the country as children must have been enrolled in college for two years, graduated from college or served in the military for at least four years.

The bill also acknowledges the importance of farmworkers to the industry and authorizes workers who continue working in agriculture to apply for permanent residence five years after the bill's enactment.

5. Protection for workers.

Exploited immigrant workers who blow the whistle on employer abuse will be eligible to apply for special visas. Employers who underpay or abuse undocumented workers will face 10-year imprisonments and will be forced to pay backpay.

The bill also provides expansive new protections against exploitation and discrimination by foreign labor contractors - including prohibiting foreign labor contractors from misleading workers and establishing new disclosure requirements in an effort to prevent human trafficking.

While E-Verify is a flawed system, but the bill will make improvements designed to provide workers with redress in case of system errors or employer misuse. Employers will be required to use the improved version of E-Verify within five years.

6. Achievable border security.

We now have the strongest border security in American history. The bill makes it stronger by expanding enforcement at the border. To construct a workable and humane immigration system, we need to target enforcement, spend resources wisely and respect basic rights. We also need to stay vigilant to make sure border security measures don't become an excuse to stop the undocumented from receiving legal status and earning citizenship.

While this bill is not entirely perfect, it would represent a marked improvement over the current dysfunctional system. The bill needs support from both parties to move through Congress and to the President, and could clear the Senate in the coming weeks. This short timeline makes it all the more urgent we make our voices heard as amendments we like and dislike are introduced

We need to stand together to make sure these changes will work as they're supposed to and that they're fair to all workers. The only way this bill will become a law we can all live with is if we keep pushing to make it happen.

We are committed to working with the our fellow unionists to make sure that Congress passes sensible and fair immigration legislation that will create a roadmap to citizenship without burdensome barriers, protect all working families, and strengthen future immigration channels.