

# Getting back to immigration basics

## OUR OPINION: COMPREHENSIVE REFORMS MUST NOT BE COMPROMISED

THE MIAMI HERALD  
JUL. 10, 2006

Dueling congressional hearings have brought immigration to the forefront of public consciousness. Even Miami is hosting a Senate hearing today on immigrants in the armed forces. Yet important basics are being lost as posturing House lawmakers try to dominate the debate.

The current immigration system is unenforceable because it doesn't meet the demands of our economy or national security. To effectively control our borders and immigrant flows, we need a rational policy and an adequate supply of legal workers. Fixing the status of illegal immigrants would free law enforcers to focus on real terrorists instead of busboys and nannies.

### Supply of legal labor

Enforcement alone, the U.S. House bill's approach, will solve little. Federal dollars tripled the number of border-patrol agents and boosted border-enforcement spending five fold in the last decade, but the number of undocumented immigrants doubled. Yet in hearings last week, House members pushed their plan to build more fences and deport all undocumented immigrants. They raised alarms about the threat of terrorists sneaking across from Mexico, though the only terrorist border-crossers came from Canada. They didn't note that mass deportations could cripple key U.S. industries and shift enforcement away from counter-terrorism efforts.

The Senate's far more sensible bill includes tough enforcement provisions *and* adds legal avenues for foreign workers. Immigrants would have to work, learn English and pay fines and back taxes. A temporary-worker program would provide the future labor flows demanded by our economy. With such a supply of legal labor, employer sanctions would then be enforceable. To be effective, such comprehensive reform must come in one package, not piecemeal.

### Tactics may boomerang

Now House Republicans are demanding that enforcement must come "first" and then, perhaps, "trigger" other provisions such as a guest-worker program. Yet they haven't budged from the punitive provisions of their original bill. The Senate bill, which passed with bipartisan support and after serious public debate, already contains many compromises.

President Bush and Senate reformers have made strenuous efforts to get the House to negotiate, to no avail. We understand their good-faith efforts to get immigration reforms passed this year. But reformers should not have to settle for anything less than a comprehensive measure.

The House clearly meant to delay, if not doom, immigration reform with their hearings. But intangibility promises to boomerang. Hearings already have increased public cries for congressional action. If immigration reform fails, the disappointed electorate will know whom to blame.