

# Wanted: effective, comprehensive reform

## OUR OPINION: REJECT PUNITIVE BILLS, POLITICAL GAMES

The Miami Herald  
Sep. 24, 2006

Remember the anti-immigrant Sensenbrenner bill that inspired hundreds of thousands of Hispanics to protest nationwide last spring? It's back -- only slightly modified and broken into several measures just approved by the House. These bills contain dangerous provisions that would give unchecked power to immigration and law-enforcement authorities and would invite civil-rights abuses. Equally worrisome, their passage would undermine efforts to effectively reform our broken immigration system.

### Risking voter backlash

The resurgence of these measures only confirms that the bipartisan push for comprehensive reforms, led by the Senate, is dead this year. What's left is a misguided move by Republican House leaders trying to maintain their majority. Their goal is to gain political capital in November elections by passing punitive immigration laws.

Yet both parties risk a voter backlash by not addressing the central immigration issue: that the U.S. economy creates more jobs than natives can fill. When Americans see unpicked crops rotting (as has happened with Florida oranges, California pears and Idaho potatoes), restaurants' stacked-up dirty dishes and unmanned construction sites, they should hold Congress accountable. These objectionable bills will make matters worse:

- **HR 6061** would build 700 miles of fence on the U.S.-Mexico border. The Senate has already approved fence-building provisions in a comprehensive immigration bill (S 2611) that includes enforcement measures, a temporary-worker plan and an earned-legalization program for the nation's 12 million undocumented immigrants.
- **HR 6094** would explicitly allow the indefinite detention of immigrants who have served time for a crime but cannot be deported -- a practice *twice* ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court. This bill also would grant the U.S. Attorney sweeping authority to designate any group a "gang" and then deport anyone deemed a member, without the need to prove criminal activity.
- **HR 6095** would, in effect, deputize all state and local police forces to investigate, arrest and lock up suspected illegal immigrants. This will drive some immigrants deeper underground, pit immigrant communities against their police officers and offer endless opportunities for jailing U.S. citizens.

### A must-pass bill

The Senate should defeat the fence measure when it comes to a floor vote, perhaps by Monday. The concern with the other bills is that they could be attached to the Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill during closed-door House-Senate conference negotiations now under way.

Immigration-authorization bills, however, shouldn't be included in a spending bill. Fortunately, Senate conference leaders have said they don't want to interfere with approval of a must-pass bill. With only a week left before recess for elections, we hope that this sentiment prevails.