



Congress must not try to duck President Obama's wise, politically astute call for immigration reform

Editorials

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Charles Dharapak/AP

President Obama spoke about immigration reform in El Paso, Texas on Tuesday.

With a speech in the border town of [El Paso, Tex.](#), yesterday, [President Obama](#) picked up the long-stalled, much-needed fight for comprehensive immigration reform.

Powerfully, he called for fulfilling a bargain Congress set out when [Washington](#) last tried and failed to bring order to the flow of U.S. newcomers.

That deal called for securing the borders and stepping up enforcement before tackling the issue of America's 11 million illegal residents as well as easing barriers to legal immigration.

The [United States](#) has doubled the number of border agents, to 20,000, since 2004. The government deported 400,000 illegals in 2009, the most in history. The much-demanded border fence is nearly complete. The costs have run into the billions of dollars.

Consider it mission accomplished, as much as the enforcement mission can ever be accomplished under a system that practically invites illegals to come while barring the energy and entrepreneurship of immigrants who want to come legally.

One-quarter of high-tech startups in this country - employing some 200,000 people - had at least one immigrant co-founder. Every high-skilled visa is estimated to create five jobs, primarily in research and development and exports. Some 41% of U.S. patents have foreign-born inventors or co-inventors.

According to the Partnership for a New American Economy - which is co-chaired by, among others, [Mayor Bloomberg](#) and [News Corp. Chairman Rupert Murdoch](#) and counts Daily News [Chairman and Publisher Mortimer B. Zuckerman](#) as a member - immigrants are twice as likely to start a business as are native-born entrepreneurs.

The [Social Security Administration's](#) chief actuary estimates that illegals have contributed between \$120 billion and \$240 billion to the system - money they will never get back.

The [Center for American Progress](#) believes a path to legalization will gain the U.S. economy \$1.5 trillion - yes, trillion - over 10 years.

Meanwhile, huge numbers of businesses depend on temporary immigrant workers. And the [Cato Institute](#) calculates that deporting just 30% of illegal immigrants, of which there are 8 million in the workforce, would cost the economy a whopping \$80 billion.

America's chaotic, economically harmful mess of an immigration system must be transformed into an engine for growth. And reality dictates that the country must provide a path to citizenship for illegal residents who pay taxes and fines, and learn English.

Obama's cause is a wise one and, given America's growing Hispanic population, may well be politically sound, too. He'll have to press his case with vigor to bring a reluctant Congress around.