

# Roll Call

## Immigration Supporters Strike Back at Boston Naysayers

By: David M. Drucker – April 19, 2013

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Supporters of an immigration overhaul moved Friday to discredit claims that the Boston Marathon bombings undermine the case for comprehensive changes.

The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, published a blog post in the afternoon arguing that passage of a Senate bill that would strengthen border security but also provide a path to citizenship for millions of illegal immigrant residents would enhance national security and only help in the effort to prevent future terrorist attacks. The bombings were allegedly committed by ethnic Chechen immigrants, one of whom became a U.S. citizen last year.

“Details about the Boston bombers are surfacing by the minute, but many opponents of immigration reform are already using it as an excuse to oppose reform. There is no reason to assume that continuing the status quo immigration policy will prevent future terrorist attacks,” Cato Immigration Policy Analyst Alex Nowrasteh wrote. “Legalizing the peaceful and otherwise law-abiding unauthorized immigrants here will allow law enforcement to focus on legitimate national security and crime threats.”

Opponents of the bipartisan Senate proposal — and others who might support it but remain undecided on the legislation — made a direct connection between the immigrant background of the Boston bombing suspects and the push for a comprehensive overhaul in Congress.

They essentially suggested that regularizing illegal immigrant residents and increasing the number of immigration visas granted for high- and low-skill employment would jeopardize national security by making it more likely for potential terrorist to legally enter the United States. Both the Senate bill and a comprehensive House proposal that is still being negotiated include these measures.

Supporters of a comprehensive immigration overhaul are worried that opponents might have finally found, in the immigrant backgrounds of the Boston bombing suspects, a way to halt the political momentum that has bolstered the prospects for congressional action. A spokesman for Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., joined the chorus of “gang of eight” immigration negotiators attempting to rebut the charges leveled by the opponents of their bill, as did Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and John McCain, R-Ariz., who issued this joint statement.

“In the wake of this week’s terrorist attack in Boston, some have already suggested that the circumstances of this terrible tragedy are justification for delaying or stopping entirely the effort for comprehensive immigration reform. In fact the opposite is true,” McCain and Graham said. “Immigration reform will strengthen our nation’s security by

helping us identify exactly who has entered our country and who has left – a basic function of government that our broken immigration system is incapable of accomplishing today. The status quo is unacceptable. We have 11 million people living in the shadows, which leaves this nation vulnerable to a myriad of threats. That is all the more reason why comprehensive immigration reform is so essential. By modernizing our system of legal immigration, identifying and conducting background checks on people here illegally, and finally securing our border, we will make America more secure.”

In an email, a Senate Democratic aide made a similar case. This aide said that the gang of eight proposal could be amended to include provisions to fill any holes in current immigration law that might have contributed to what happened in Boston. Here are the three counterpoints offered by this Democratic aide:

1. There are not enough facts out yet regarding this case; it is irresponsible to jump to conclusions. Opponents of an immigration overhaul who are trying to exploit the tragedy in Boston for political reasons are only discrediting themselves.
2. If federal officials find that this case exposes any gaps in the system that have not already been addressed, an immigration overhaul is a chance to close those gaps.
3. An immigration overhaul will make the country safer by bringing people out of the shadows, having them undergo background checks and register. This will better enable law enforcement to know who is here, and who is truly pursuing the American dream versus who is here to do the country harm.