

THE WEEK

6 things you should know about the new Senate immigration bill

By Keith Wagstaff | April 16, 2013

As expected, the Gang of Eight released a summary of its immigration reform bill on Tuesday. The bipartisan group of eight senators — which includes Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), and John McCain (R-Ariz.) — have released, in the words of The New York Times, "the most ambitious effort in at least 26 years to repair, update, and reshape the American immigration system." What does that include?

1. A path to citizenship for America's 11 million undocumented immigrants

No surprise here. The so-called "path to citizenship" would allow undocumented immigrants with no felonies to pay a \$500 fine and back taxes in order to gain "registered provisional" status — which would protect them from deportation. After six years, if they still have a clean record and another \$500, they can keep that status, according to The Washington Post.

Ten years after initially gaining registered provisional status, they would be allowed to apply for a green card, provided they pay \$1,000, take English and civics classes, have paid all of their taxes, and have avoided committing any felonies. Three years after that they would be free to apply for full citizenship.

For kids who qualify for the DREAM Act — i.e., students who came here before the age of 16 and have been in the United States for more than five years — the path to citizenship would only be five years instead of 13, as long as they successfully complete two years of college or spend two years in the military.

2. Billions for border security

The Department of Homeland Security might be the biggest winner in this bill. According to CNN, it would gain \$3 billion in additional funding for better fences, more Border Patrol agents, unmanned drones, and drone operators.

The DHS would then have five years to reach its "Border Security Goal," which entails apprehending and returning 90 percent of the people who try to cross into the United States illegally. If it were to fail, the program would be reassessed by Congress.

3. More pressure on employers thanks to E-Verify

U.S. companies with more than 5,000 employees would be forced to use the E-Verify system, which would run a potential employee's photo identification against a huge database of photos to verify their legal status. The proposal has detractors across the political spectrum, with both the ACLU and Cato Institute warning that it would more or less create a national ID, according to The Washington Post. "It's big government at its worst," says Jim Harper, director of information studies at the Cato Institute.

4. A mixed bag for Silicon Valley

On one hand, tech companies would get an increase in the number of H1-B visas available for high-skilled workers like engineers — something that none other than Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has been lobbying for. The problem, according to Politico, is that companies with 15 percent of their workforce on H1-B visas would have to prove, with each new hire, that they weren't displacing a U.S. worker with a foreign one. In Silicon Valley that could slow the growth of otherwise rapidly expanding start-ups.

5. New visas for low-skill workers

The bill would create 20,000 new W-visas in 2015, for employees who would work in nursing homes or provide in-home care, for example. After five years that number could increase to 200,000 depending on factors like employer demand. Currently, companies have no good way to bring in low-skill, year-round workers because current visas only apply to temporary and seasonal workers, according to USA Today. If passed, the measure would be a boon to nursing homes, assisted-living facilities, restaurants, and hotels.

6. Good news for parents and children, bad news for siblings

Today, there is a cap of 88,000 visas available for the spouses, children, and parents of permanent citizens in the United States, according to ABC News. The new bill would eliminate that cap, making it easier for immigrants to bring their families with them. The downside for citizens with brothers and sisters overseas? Visas for siblings, as well as married children over 31, would be cut.