



Bizarre Proposals to “End” Illegal Immigration

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In 2007 our determined public servants on Capitol Hill outdid themselves coming up with new ways to target “illegal immigration,” and make it the new fear-driven wedge issue of American politics. Following is a snapshot of some of the strangest and ugliest proposals drafted by Members of the 110th Congress thus far. Do they offer real solutions or simply false promises to end illegal immigration? You be the judge.

What Part Of “Legal” Don’t You Understand? Leading anti-immigration Republican Tom Tancredo’s *OVERDUE Act* (H.R. 4192) is an overblown mishmash of bad immigration enforcement ideas and radical changes to our *legal* immigration system. Some of its most extreme provisions would all but end the legal family immigration system, severely restrict employer-sponsored immigration, and reduce the number of refugees we protect in the U.S. to just a trickle. While Representative Tancredo claims his goal is to end *illegal* immigration, it is hard to see how such dramatic cuts in *legal* immigration would do the trick. In fact, the Tancredo bill would probably have the opposite effect, since increased illegal immigration is directly tied to our outdated legal admissions quotas.

Department of State or Department of Genetic Testing? Representative Tancredo’s H.R. 4192 contains other head-scratchers, like the section straight out of George Orwell’s *1984* that would require anyone who qualifies for family-based legal immigration to give up a swab of their DNA to a government agent. Representative Tancredo was apparently so pleased with this—ahem—novel idea he even introduced it as a stand-alone bill, H.R. 3860.

All Most Some Persons Born or Naturalized? Proposals like Representative Nathan Deal’s (R-GA) *Birthright Citizenship Act* (H.R. 1940) would gut the 14th amendment by denying U.S. citizenship to U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants. The amendment that granted citizenship to “all persons born or naturalized” in the U.S., including freed slaves, was aimed at eliminating second class “non-citizenship” policies. Not only are proposals like H.R. 1940 plainly unconstitutional, but it is absurd to think that creating more undocumented people would somehow reduce the number of undocumented immigrants.

No Visa, No VISA. Undocumented workers have been accused of a variety of ills, but opening bank accounts and applying for credit cards were never on the list until Senator David Vitter (R-LA) introduced S. 2393. The Vitter bill would deny undocumented immigrants the American Dream of making purchases on credit. This, combined with a provision to end the nefarious practice of undocumented workers saving money in U.S. banks, would close a gaping loophole that has allowed so many of them to buy goods, pay sales tax, and help bolster the nation’s economy.

All Immigration, All the Time? This year, Republican Members of Congress proved it is possible to turn *any* debate into a referendum on immigration when they targeted the *Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Reauthorization Act* (H.R. 2786) with immigration-related riders. Amendments filed by Representatives Steve King (R-IA) and Tom Price (R-GA) would have made sure no money in the bill could be used to hire or house undocumented immigrants (and even

some legal residents). If only those provisions had been in place during the 17th century! But seriously, excluding the undocumented from employment and public benefits is already the law of the land. This was just a replay of the Republican “broken record” strategy of making every debate an immigration debate. Which leaves us taxpayers to wonder: when will it be time to put this one-trick pony out to pasture and get back to the People’s business?

No Immigration Check, No Farm Check. This year, Republican Members of Congress and presidential candidates also made community policing a wedge issue, by railing against police departments that encourage crime victims and witnesses—even the undocumented—to work with the police and report crimes. In one of the most comical jabs at community policing, Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH) filed two amendments to the farm bill (S.A. 3707 and S.A. 3705) that would deny agricultural subsidies to farmers located in so-called “sanctuary cities.” This phrase, which has become a dirty word in Republican circles, refers to cities and states that refuse to inquire about the immigration status of crime victims and witnesses. The Gregg amendments to the farm bill were a total *non sequitur* but did raise an interesting point: why are people in cities getting farm subsidies in the first place?

Bipartisan Bad Ideas. Many immigration proposals introduced in the 110th Congress are supposed to reduce the undocumented immigrant population—estimated at 12 million or so—through enforcement alone. Dubbed “enforcement-first,” “enforcement-only,” or “comprehensive enforcement bills,” these are actually “expulsion-only” bills, and offer no more of a solution to illegal immigration than the status quo. In 2007, Representative Heath Shuler (D-NC) teamed up with former anti-immigration lobbyist Representative Brian Bilbray (R-CA) to introduce H.R. 4088, a bill that would drive undocumented immigrant workers off our tax rolls but not *en masse* out of the country. The Shuler-Bilbray bill would push undocumented workers further into the shadows and into the arms of unscrupulous employers, creating ever-more-exploitable workers and putting well-meaning employers out of business. Recycling the current failed immigration enforcement policies is hardly a recipe for change, whether the bill is bipartisan or not. Senators Mark Pryor (D-AR) and Mary Landrieu (D-LA), and Senator David Vitter, have introduced companion bills (S. 2368 and S. 2366, respectively), making this a bipartisan, bicameral bust.

Solutions or Sound Bites? We Report, You Decide. Even Representative Tom Tancredo (R-CO), the uber-immigration hawk, would admit that rounding up and deporting 12 million undocumented immigrants is a pipe dream (or the dream of someone smoking a pipe). It would take the government nearly fifty years and cost U.S. taxpayers over \$200 billion just to carry out these deportations at the current (record-setting) rate. Yet one of the most popular Republican “solutions” to the problem of illegal immigration is to turn all 12 million undocumented workers into criminals. Bills sponsored by former House Judiciary Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) (H.R. 4056) and Senate Minority Whip Jon Kyl (R-AZ) (S. 2294) fall into this category. In addition to an expensive deportation, the Sensenbrenner-Kyl approach would treat these immigrants to a taxpayer funded criminal trial, court-appointed counsel, and a stay in a Federal prison before their flight out.

Want more unrealistic, budget-busting, sounds-tough immigration laws we have no chance of enforcing? Then pass these bills. If you want solutions, though, you’ll have to look beyond these shallow sound bites and silly proposals.