



Thoughts From . . .

CAPITOL HILL

By Congressman Rodney Alexander



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The House of Representatives Must Stand Firm Against Amnesty

Senate Bill Is Not Tough Enough on Illegal Immigration

WASHINGTON, D.C. – This week, the Senate has been debating various provisions in an immigration reform bill that includes amnesty for illegal immigrants.

In my opinion, and in the opinion of the majority of my constituents, whether or not to grant amnesty to the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants living in our country is not a question that requires debate. The answer is clear: The United States must not reward those who break the law.

Last week, a bipartisan group of senators, led by Senator Ted Kennedy, D-Massachusetts, introduced this legislation, which would allow illegal aliens to remain in the United States by placing them on a “probationary” status and allowing them to continue working on a “Z” visa status. After several years, a “Z” visa holder is eligible to become a permanent resident and later a citizen.

Proponents of the bill say this delay in citizenship does not equal amnesty, but they aren’t fooling anyone – not even us “country folk.” Amnesty occurs when an illegal immigrant is not deported as required by law but is legalized and allowed to stay. So they can call it – or not call it – what they will, but I will not support amnesty in any form.

Beyond amnesty, however, the bill contains many other flaws. For example, the Senate bill does not require “Z” visa holders in probationary status to pay back taxes owed for the time they worked illegally in the United States.

Also, it is not tough enough on passport fraud and misuse. It actually weakens existing criminal laws prohibiting passport fraud and misuse by eliminating increased punishments for violations intended to deter serious crimes such as drug trafficking and terrorist acts.

This leads to the biggest flaw of all – provisions that will weaken our national security.

Foremost in the immigration debate should be our understanding that open borders make our nation extremely vulnerable to terrorism. Not all illegal immigrants come to America to work hard and create a better life for their families; many are terrorists who are entering our nation to cause us harm. Congress must take steps to guard against this threat; but the Senate, it seems, is taking backward steps.

The bill does not require the miles of border fence that Congress mandated in a bill President Bush signed last October. "The Secure Fence Act" requires over 700 miles of border fence, but the Senate bill cuts that number to 370 miles. Additionally, the Senate bill does not make engaging in terrorist activity a bar to the "good moral character" requirement for obtaining immigration benefits, such as a "Z" visa.

The Senate debates are likely to go on for a while; and, in the meantime, I will continue to work with my fellow members of the House Immigration Reform Caucus to ensure that the House of Representatives does not pass this weak and injudicious legislation should it come before us for a vote.

I do so knowing that I have the support of my constituency behind me.

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