

Published in the Ramona Sentinel on April 21, 2010

Now that health care legislation has been finalized, the Obama Administration and Congressional leaders have hinted at the possibility of moving forward with illegal immigration reform sometime this year. The prospect is still uncertain but one thing is clear. Any attempt at reform that does not make enforcement a priority will fall short in addressing the real problems with illegal immigration and should be opposed outright.

The more responsible approach is straightforward: secure our nation's borders, starting with the U.S.-Mexico land border, and strengthen the enforcement of existing immigration laws.

It is no surprise that proponents of immigration reform have focused their energy on pushing an agenda that encompasses amnesty and open borders. What they seemingly fail to recognize is that the violence and destruction that is common along the Southern border is often the result of inadequate enforcement and policies that encourage illegal entry – including the prospect of amnesty.

More than 8,000 people were killed due to violence on the U.S.-Mexico border last year alone, far surpassing the number of deaths attributable to insurgent activity in Iraq and Afghanistan since the start of combat operations. This constitutes a serious threat that must be matched with strong enforcement at the border and within our communities, or else the problems connected to the unrelenting smuggling of drugs, weapons and humans will persist.

First off, there must be an integrated security strategy along our borders, incorporating the necessary manpower, technology and infrastructure. There is less than 700 miles of infrastructure on the Southern land border, leaving nearly 1,300 miles open and unprotected. There are currently no plans to build additional infrastructure or add to the force size of the U.S. Border Patrol. The Obama Administration even went a step further, zeroing funding for Southwest border prosecutions in its most recent budget proposal to Congress.

Next is interior enforcement. The problem right now is not with the existence of insufficient laws but rather an insufficient commitment to enforcing these laws. Contrary to federal law, many

communities across the country maintain sanctuary policies, San Diego included, which deny the ability of law enforcement to inquire about an individual's legal status. This offers good reason for these communities to lose eligibility for certain federal funding, including criminal incarceration and homeland security dollars – an effective method of ensuring compliance.

Legislators in Arizona rightfully took action to allow state and local police to appropriately verify immigration status and make arrests when necessary, building on the success of the 287(g) program that the Obama Administration has wrongly attempted to roll back over the last year. The program selectively allows certain local enforcement agencies to enforce federal immigration laws in coordination with federal authorities.

California and the sanctuary city of San Diego should now follow Arizona's example and provide our local sheriffs and other law enforcement with the authority to enforce the law. The federal government must do its share too, providing funding, resources and training wherever needed.

There must also be a reliable system for workplace enforcement. American jobs should always go to American workers, even in times of economic prosperity. This will require stringent workplace verification requirements for employers, similar to the E-Verify system or any other available technology, as well as tough criminal penalties and consistent enforcement by the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice.

In preparation for the immigration reform debate, I introduced legislation with a bipartisan group of my colleagues that outlines several basic principles to help guide this discussion forward. The legislation, H. Res. 1026, the Bipartisan Reform of Immigration through Responsible Enforcement (BRIDGE) Resolution, emphasizes a focus on workplace enforcement and border security, and rejects amnesty.

These principles will go a long way toward enacting responsible immigration reform that puts security and enforcement first. We must demonstrate we are serious about upholding our nation's immigration laws. The policies and tools are already in place, it's now just a matter of putting them to work.