

ISSUE BRIEF

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Numbers Show Obama's Lack of Commitment on Immigration Enforcement

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President Barack Obama commented on Univision radio that, with a second term, he would get immigration reform “done.” The last attempt at immigration reform occurred in 2007 when President George W. Bush failed due to the perception that his Administration did not take border security and interior enforcement as seriously as it should have. The Obama Administration runs the risk of a similar failure if it cannot show the American people that it truly understands the issue and that the proposed solution will really solve the illegal immigration problem in America.

Bad News to Start the Year.

The most recent news, combined with the Administration's decision to kill the Section 287(g) interior enforcement program, does not indicate a true commitment to immigration reform. Based on the latest data,

the deportation cases filed against illegal immigrants in the first three months of the fiscal year shows a dramatic one-third reduction, from 58,639 to 39,331. The big drop is likely due to the Administration's policy decision to focus just on felons and to review the 300,000 cases pending in the system.

Similarly, the number of deportations for the first four months of the fiscal year total 121,780. If this four-month trend continues, the deportations in 2012 will hit roughly 368,000 illegal immigrants, which would be a nearly 30,000-person drop in deportations from 2011. This figure would be just 10,000 more deportations than the total in 2008.

Another figure that does not bode well for the Obama Administration is the continued increase in the length of time it takes to deport an illegal immigrant. The immigration court processing time has gone from just over 230 days in 2009 to 302 days in 2011, a 31 percent increase.

The Obama Administration will have to do a lot of footwork to convince the American public that filing fewer deportation cases, taking longer to process those cases, and deporting fewer illegal immigrants is indicative of an effort to reduce illegal immigration.

Immigration Reform Requires True Effort to Reduce Illegal Immigration.

As President Bush learned, the American people (and, by extension, Congress) will not support comprehensive immigration reform until they believe that the federal government is doing all it can to limit and reduce illegal immigration. Because Americans were burned by the last reform in 1987, they see the word *comprehensive* as a code word for amnesty. Instead of continuing to weaken the current efforts, the Obama Administration should work with Congress on the following key items:

- **Secure the border.** The number of illegal border crossings has dropped due to a lack of jobs, but the flow will increase once the economy begins to show sustained strength. The border is not secure. With the increased ties between Iran and Venezuela, the still porous nature of our southern border increases the risk of the next terrorist attack or elements thereof coming across. The U.S. should act now to secure the border before the economy and lack of enforcement create incentives for more foreigners to cross illegally.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib3525>

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- **Reinvigorate interior enforcement actions.** Instead of attacking states and localities that disproportionately bear the cost of the failed immigration system, the federal government should support efforts to bring down the presence of—and attendant costs associated with—large illegal immigrant populations. To do its part properly, the federal government should take seriously its obligation to execute the laws that Congress has enacted, including the Section 287(g) program.
- **Expand deportations.** Rather than reduce the groups subject to deportation, the Obama Administration should file cases against all illegal immigrants apprehended and deport all who agree to go. Reforming the deportation process to bring costs down and to facilitate timelier deportation is vital. America will never engage in a mass deportation program, but the federal government should deport those illegal immigrants who are apprehended.
- **Reform the visa system.** Finally, America wants and needs the world's best and brightest to work for it, not against it. In an increasingly competitive global market, America's ability to remain a technology leader depends on attracting the highest-qualified workers. The U.S. should make it easier for those workers to come and experience the American Dream.

Common-Sense Reforms Should Not Be Hard to Enact. It will certainly not get easier to fix America's immigration system when the economy is stronger and the job market again attracts risk-takers from all over the world. The solutions identified above and in other Heritage Foundation reports should not be controversial. It is time to get past the endless political grandstanding and put a few key reforms in place.

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