



A Guide to Comprehensive Immigration Reform By Jerome Grzeca, Grzeca Law Group

Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR) has been a political debate for decades. Every time it surfaces in national debate, the familiar calls for closed borders and mass deportation to amnesty for all undocumented immigrants garners great discussion in the daily news. True Comprehensive Immigration Reform, however is not a one-sided extreme measure. It's a finely tuned plan aimed toward addressing each aspect of the currently broken immigration system.

First, CIR will address the issue of approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants currently living and working in our communities, the majority of who are law-abiding, hardworking individuals who pay their taxes and contribute greatly to our society. Under comprehensive measures, a path would be created for these immigrants to step out of the shadows and earn legal status before applying for permanent residency. In order to remain in the U.S., immigrants would be required to register, pay certain fines and any back taxes, learn English and remain law-abiding.

Second, CIR would restore already established laws and enhance border security. Most comprehensive plans would enforce effective inspections and screening practices, fair proceedings, efficient processing and define strategies that target lawbreaking employers. Appropriate border security practices would facilitate the cross-border flow of products and services, while focusing enforcement resources on those who do not follow the rule of law.

Equally as important, CIR would enhance the process for U.S. employers to hire essential workers through expanded recruiting programs, thereby ending an era of restriction. U.S. employers could resume actively recruiting worldwide for individuals in specialty occupations, including Scientists, Engineers, Mathematicians and Medical Professionals. One of the most common myths about CIR is that jobs will be taken away from American workers as a result of measures like these. However, these highly skilled people are usually the best in their chosen field and help American businesses plant the seeds for future growth and economic stability. Furthermore, immigration actually supplements the U.S. labor force and helps create new jobs. Since 2000, the quota of H-1B visas extended for this purpose has decreased substantially from 195,000 per year to 65,000, hampering U.S. companies' ability to innovate at a rate equal to or greater than the global competition. CIR would also expand legal channels for essential workers in low- or semi-skilled occupations to work in the U.S., beyond a season-by-season basis.

On December 15, 2009, Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez from Illinois introduced The Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act of 2009 (CIR ASAP) in the House of Representatives. This bill includes the following elements as a pathway to legalization for undocumented workers:

- The development of a fair and practical approach for the estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants living, working and raising families in the United States that leads to a path of earned citizenship.
- Professional and Effective Border Enforcement: A system based on 21st century enforcement strategies to strengthen our nation's physical and economic security, while staying true to our nation's values.
- Smart and Humane Interior Enforcement: The promotion of humane treatment of detainees, fair immigration proceedings and policies that respect the principles of community policing.
- Verification Systems: Ensure the proper functionality of current employment eligibility verification systems to prevent employers from exploiting the system and undermine workers' rights.
- Family Unity as a Cornerstone of Our Immigration System: A focus that promotes keeping families strong, united and treating all immigrant families fairly and equally
- Future Flow of Workers: The development of a guest worker program that is driven by economic need to ensure that the United States continues to attract the best and brightest from around the world. The plan will propose an employment based visa system to align with the actual labor market demands.
- AgJOBS: A provision for agribusiness and labor to allow farm workers both legal protection and immigration status while enabling employers a legal workforce.
- DREAM Act: This will provide a path to temporary permanent residency and possible citizenship to undocumented children and students who have grown up in America and know no other home, to participate fully and be integrated quickly into our society as Americans by meeting specific requirements.
- Promote Immigrant Integration: Commit federal resources to help new immigrants overcome the many challenges that they face and assist them in becoming an integral part of America.

There is no question that CIR is necessary. President Barack Obama once again emphasized his commitment to revamping the United States' broken immigration systems during his State of the Union Address. The social, economic and political implications of CIR are many and far-reaching. The thorough approach currently being debated may finally create a culture of acceptance and inclusion while providing an environment for economic growth and homeland security. While pieces of the proposed plan may change to some extent in the months to come, we've learned from past administrations that complacency and "band-aid" tactics are ineffective, and CIR is a valid and critical issue of our time.

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