

Guest Opinion:

Help get Congress to act on immigration now

By *Sheridan Bailey and Richard Walden*

Congress has a golden opportunity to demonstrate leadership on a crisis threatening America's economic and national security. The issue is comprehensive immigration reform.

Immigration critics are essentially correct. The current system is a disaster. We need to enhance our border security, and that very well might include erecting new barriers. Our schools, hospitals and criminal justice system are unfairly burdened with the cost of illegal immigration.

Millions who play by the rules and stay in their home countries have to wait years to immigrate legally to the United States.

Tragically, hundreds have died of thirst and exposure in the Arizona desert while this issue remains unresolved.

We do need to get tough on illegal immigration. We also need to get smart. Advocating a stricter version of the current broken policy is not an answer. Congress has failed to take seriously its constitutional responsibility to control our international borders.

Still, there is reason for optimism.

Both the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives are considering proposals to overhaul the miserable mess we call our immigration system.

In the House, Rep. Jeff Flake is joined by his Arizona colleagues Ed Pastor, Raúl Grijalva and Gabrielle Giffords in sponsoring the STRIVE Act that addresses the broad range of issues that need to be part of any comprehensive reform legislation.

In the Senate, Sen. Jon Kyl and the Bush administration are working with the Democratic majority to create a bipartisan compromise that will secure U.S. borders, give employers the tools necessary to verify employment eligibility, provide for temporary guest workers for jobs Americans won't do, and create a process to bring undocumented immigrants out of the shadows without amnesty.

Pundits on all sides agree that if a bill has any chance of passing the 110th Congress, it must happen now. Soon, 2008 presidential and congressional politics will make statesmanship and compromise on this issue practically impossible. Arizona can't wait until 2009 or 2010 for a solution to the illegal immigration crisis.

That is why we have joined with more than a hundred employers and trade associations to form a coalition called Arizona Employers for Immigration Reform. AZEIR has met and is communicating with Arizona's congressional delegation at their Arizona offices and on Capitol Hill.

Our delegation tells us that reform is long overdue and they all want the immigration crisis settled in a way that removes it from the destructive politics we have experienced on this issue over the last few years.

They agree the consequences of failing to fix the broken immigration system are too grave. In an age of terrorism, drug smuggling, human trafficking and lawlessness, our national security demands a solution.

It has been said that Congress reacts more to heat than to light. It's time to turn up the heat. AZEIR has launched a television and radio campaign urging pro-reform Arizonans to call Congress' switchboard at 1-202-224-3121.

We invite you to visit our Web site (www.azeir.org) to learn more about the issue, to view and hear our ads, and find out how to contact your congressional members directly.

The next few weeks and months will be critical to achieving the immigration reform Arizona and America needs and deserves.

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