

# The Misery Strategy

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Editorial

The path the country has set on since the defeat of immigration reform in the Senate in June enshrines enforcement and punishment above all else. It is narrow, shortsighted, disruptive and self-defeating. On top of that, it won't work.

What it will do is unleash a flood of misery upon millions of illegal immigrants. For the ideologues who have pushed the nation into this position, that is more than enough reason to plunge ahead.

The latest phase of the crackdown, expected to be announced this week, would require employers to resolve discrepancies between their employee records and those of the Social Security Administration. If the data don't match, presumably because a worker is an illegal immigrant using a false number, the worker must be fired. There are millions of people in thousands of workplaces who could be caught in that net, and the government is promising to start dragging it zealously, with stepped-up raids around the country. "We are tough, and we are going to be even tougher," said a spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security.

Toughness is now the mantra at every level of government. The Senate had struggled for years to erect the immense framework of bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform, coupling stricter enforcement with a citizenship path and an orderly future flow of workers. But restrictionists pushed the unwieldy structure over, and now even its architects have fled the scene.

Senator John McCain, trying to keep his presidential hopes aloft by jettisoning his courage and good sense, has leapt to the enforcement barricades, joining Senators Jon Kyl and Lindsey Graham in sponsoring a bill that is essentially a Minuteman's to-do list of fence-building and punishments. He has shamefully repudiated his commitment to giving illegal immigrants a way to get right with the country. Senator Arlen Specter, meanwhile, wrote an op-ed article in *The Washington Post* titled "A Less Ambitious Approach to Immigration," in which he endorsed the creation of a permanent noncitizen immigrant underclass, saying it is the best we can hope for until "a more hospitable America" emerges.

The federal government's abandonment of comprehensive reform has been matched by unprecedented crackdowns at the state and local level. Lawmakers this year have introduced more than 1,400 immigration-related bills in all 50 states, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, and enacted 170 of them. Many of the bills severely restrict where immigrants can live and work, and leave them vulnerable to

exploitation and fearful of the police. It's the federal approach of raids and aggression, metastasized across the continent.

The country will have a long time to watch this approach as it fails. The politicians who killed the Senate bill for offering "amnesty" have never offered a workable alternative. Their one big idea is that harsh, unrelenting enforcement at the border, in the workplace and in homes and streets would dry up opportunities for illegal immigrants and eventually cause the human tide to flow backward. That would be true only if life for illegal immigrants in America could be made significantly more miserable than life in, say, rural Guatemala or the slums of Mexico City. That will take a lot of time and a lot of misery to pull that off in a country that has tolerated and profited from illegal labor for generations.

The American people cherish lawfulness but resist cruelty, and have supported reform that includes a reasonable path to earned citizenship. Their leaders have given them immigration reform as pest control.