

Immigration and Fear

By [THE EDITORIAL BOARD](#)

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“How can individuals evade authorities and plan such attacks on our soil?” [asked Mr. Grassley](#), the Iowa Republican, at the beginning of a hearing on the Senate’s immigration bill. “How can we beef up security checks on people who wish to enter the U.S.?”

The country is beginning to discuss seriously the most sweeping overhaul of immigration since 1986, with hearings in the Senate last week and this week, and a possible vote by early summer. After years of stalemate, the mood has shifted sharply, with bipartisan Congressional coalitions, business and labor leaders, law-enforcement and religious groups, and a majority of the public united behind a long-delayed overhaul of the crippled system.

Until the bombing came along, the antis were running out of arguments. They cannot rail against “illegals,” since the bill is all about making things legal and upright, with registration, fines and fees. They cannot argue seriously that reform is bad for business: turning a shadow population of anonymous, underpaid laborers into on-the-books employees and taxpayers, with papers and workplace protections, will only help the economy grow.

About all they have left is scary aliens.

There is a long tradition of raw fear fouling the immigration debate. Lou Dobbs ranted about superhighways from Mexico injecting Spanish speakers deep into the heartland. Gov. Jan Brewer told lies about headless bodies in the Arizona desert. And now Representative Louie Gohmert, a Texas Republican, is warning of radical Islamists posing as Hispanics and infiltrating from the southern border.

But the Boston events have nothing to do with immigration reform. Even if we stop accepting refugees and asylum seekers, stop giving out green cards and devise a terror-profiling system that can bore into the hearts of 9-year-olds, which seems to be Dzhokhar Tsarnaev’s age when he entered the United States, we will still face risks. And we will not have fixed immigration.

There is a better way to be safer: pass an immigration bill. If terrorists, drug traffickers and gangbangers are sharp needles in the immigrant haystack, then shrink the haystack. Get 11 million people on the books. Find out who they are.

The Senate bill includes no fewer than four separate background checks as immigrants move from the shadows to citizenship. It tightens the rules on employment verification and includes new ways to prevent misuse of Social Security numbers. It has an entry-exit visa system to monitor traffic at borders and ports.

And if we are serious about making America safer, why not divert some of the billions now lavished on the border to agencies fighting gangs, drugs, illegal guns and workplace abuse? Or to

community policing and English-language classes, so immigrants can more readily cooperate with law enforcement? Why not make immigrants feel safer and invested in their neighborhoods, so they don't fear and shun the police? Why not stop outsourcing immigration policing to local sheriffs who chase traffic offenders and janitors?

As we have seen with the failure of gun control, a determined minority wielding false arguments can kill the best ideas. The immigration debate will test the resilience of the reform coalition in Congress. Changes so ambitious require calm, thoughtful deliberation, and a fair amount of courage. They cannot be allowed to come undone with irrelevant appeals to paranoia and fear.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/21/opinion/sunday/immigration-and-fear.html>