

Gutierrez Outlines Core Principles for a New Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill

October 13, 2009

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Washington DC) At a rally today on the west lawn of the United States Capitol, U.S. Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL) addressed a crowd of thousands who demanded change to our nation's broken immigration system. Rep. Gutierrez' address responded to a recent call from the immigration advocacy community to introduce comprehensive immigration reform in the House of Representatives.

Rep. Gutierrez has been actively talking to advocacy and civil rights groups, faith-based groups, labor groups and his colleagues on the Hill to identify the most essential components of such a comprehensive bill. Today he outlined some of those core principles.

In a statement, Rep. Gutierrez said:

"We simply cannot wait any longer for a bill that keeps our families together, protects our workers and allows a pathway to legalization for those who have earned it. It is time we had a workable plan making its way through Congress that recognizes the vast contributions of immigrants to this country and that honors the American Dream. I am preparing such a plan, and will introduce it in the near future. It will include the following core principles:"

Pathway to legalization for undocumented workers:

"Immigration reform will not work unless it takes a practical approach to dealing with the 12 million undocumented immigrants living, working, and raising families in the United States. We need a bill that says if you come here to hurt our communities, we will not support you. But if you are here to work hard—if you are here to make a better life for your family—you will have the opportunity to earn your citizenship."

"Our immigrants are hardworking, and they are up to the challenge. Give them the opportunity to earn their citizenship, and they will go through the background checks; they will pay their fair share of taxes; and they will learn English. It's not an easy process, but it is a fair process."

Professional and effective border enforcement:

"We need professional and effective border enforcement. That means 21st century enforcement strategies that both make our nation's physical and economic security stronger and stay true to our nation's values. We need to require the federal government to make a real, working partnership with border communities and other stakeholders when designing and executing border enforcement policies."

Smart and humane interior enforcement:

"Inside the country, my plan will promote fair immigration proceedings, humane treatment of immigration detainees and policies that respect the tenets of community policing."

Protecting workers:

"Immigration reform will not work without a strong commitment to America's labor force. Without it, too many employers will continue to pervert the system. We must expand the labor rights of workers and punish those dishonest employers who continue to exploit immigrants in order to undermine their honest competitors."

Verification systems:

"We must fix the current employment eligibility verification system, not only to protect Americans who are denied the right to work because of errors in the government's databases, but also to prevent employers who would exploit the system and undermine workers' rights. A vastly improved verification system is fundamental to reducing illegal immigration."

Family unity as a cornerstone of our immigration system:

"Family is the bedrock of our society, and immigration reform must support strong, united families and treat all immigrant families fairly and equally. Right now, our broken immigration system keeps too many American families apart for years and even decades, when they have done everything legally. We need a system predicated on family values by developing laws that better value families — a system that keeps families strong and, most importantly, keeps husbands and wives, parents and children together."

Future flows of workers:

"Our country attracts the best and brightest and the hardest workers from around the globe. That is a source of strength. But our current employment-based immigration laws are often at odds with the needs of our labor market and our economy. Many of our guest worker programs are badly broken, and they undermine workers' rights. At the same time, our visa quotas are determined by politics, not by labor and economic need. My plan will create an employment-based visa system that is fair to workers and employers. It will ensure full labor rights for all workers, and it will create a commission to align visa numbers with actual labor market demands and economic needs, not political winds."

AgJOBS:

"Agriculture plays a fundamental role in our nation's economy and in securing our nation's food supply. Comprehensive immigration reform must provide an agreement between labor and agribusiness that allows farm workers to access legal protections and immigration status while enabling employers to ensure a legal workforce and stabilize their businesses."

DREAM Act:

"We all want a country that is better educated, better motivated and better prepared for the future. My plan will strengthen the DREAM Act, making it quicker and easier for students who grew up in America and know no other home to fully participate in our society. Immigrants brought here as children should not be punished with fines or other means; rather, they should be fully integrated into our society as the Americans they truly are—and as quickly as possible."

Promoting immigrant integration:

"For years, state and local governments have taken the lead in helping new immigrants become new Americans. Recent arrivals face many challenges when navigating this process, yet the federal government has done little to help. I plan to recommit federal resources to promoting and assisting immigrant integration. It is about staying true to our nation's success story of welcoming newcomers and helping them become part of the fabric of America."

"If we are to truly fix any of these critical issues, we must address all of them."

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