

## **Editorial: At last - a fair approach to immigration reform**

San Jose Mercury News (California)

May 18, 2007 Friday

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**Section:** OPINION; **Editorials**

**Length:** 486 words

**Byline:** Mercury News **Editorial**

### **Body**

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**Immigration reform** took a huge and promising step forward Thursday. The policies recommended by key Senate negotiators and supported by President Bush would accomplish much of what's needed to restore a rational **immigration** policy that is both **fair** and humane.

The exact language of the bipartisan bill has yet to be worked out, and concerns linger about some issues.

But the fundamental principles agreed upon by the Senate team, led by Sens. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., provide a sound basis for **reform**. The Senate will thrash out details before voting on the plan next week and sending it to the House for further work.

Several provisions of the agreement are especially encouraging:

A promise to clear the horrendous visa backlog. The bill would immediately issue more than 1 million visas to applicants for permanent residency, going a long way to clearing the 4 million applications in the system. The rest of the backlog would be cleared within eight years instead of the 20-something it would take under current law.

More visas for skilled workers. The number of H-1B visas would roughly double from 65,000 to 115,000 per year, with the ability to raise the cap in years of high demand.

A **fair** path to citizenship. The estimated 12 million immigrants who entered this country illegally before Jan. 1, 2007, would be granted special "Z visas" to work and live here. They could apply for permanent residency after eight years, but they would need to pay \$5,000 in fines, demonstrate English and civics knowledge and compete with all other immigrants seeking that status. (One unworkable provision would require the head of the household to leave the United States and apply for a "green card" from the home country - an unreasonable burden for someone supporting a family.)

Improved border enforcement and employer accountability. The bill calls for 18,000 new border patrol agents, additional fencing and high-tech tools for enforcement. It also establishes a new, supposedly tamper-proof identification system for legal immigrants and requires employers to take stricter steps to verify workers' identity.

Special provisions for farm workers. It would be far easier for seasonal workers to legally enter the country and either work temporarily or apply for permanent status. This is critical for California, which relies on these workers to harvest crops.

The draft agreement also leaves some key questions unanswered. These include how resident visas will be handed out, how family reunification will be balanced against the need for more skilled workers and how temporary workers would apply for permanent status.

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But there will be plenty of opportunity to remedy problems now that agreement on a basic framework seems achievable. For now, it's refreshing just to see an approach to the nation's immigration problems that, in Kennedy's words, goes beyond "bumper-sticker solutions" toward real reform.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** PASSPORTS & VISAS (92%); IMMIGRATION (91%); EMPLOYMENT VISAS (90%); AGREEMENTS (89%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (79%); CITIZENSHIP (79%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (79%); MIGRATION ISSUES (79%); FOREIGN LABOR (79%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (79%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); PUBLIC POLICY (78%); FINES & PENALTIES (78%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (78%); WORKFORCE DEMAND (77%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (72%); SEASONAL WORKERS (71%); BORDER CONTROL (70%); TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT (69%); FARM LABOR (68%)

**Industry:** FARM LABOR (68%)

**Person:** TED KENNEDY (59%); JON KYL (59%); GEORGE W BUSH (59%)

**Geographic:** MASSACHUSETTS, USA (79%); CALIFORNIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

**Load-Date:** June 18, 2007