

Bush, Signing Bill for Border Fence, Urges Wider Overhaul

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Body

President **Bush** signed into law on Thursday a **bill** providing for construction of 700 miles of added **fencing** along the Southwestern **border**, calling the legislation "an important step toward immigration reform."

The new law is what most House Republicans wanted. But it is not what Senate Republicans or Mr. **Bush** originally envisioned, and at the **signing**, in the Roosevelt Room of the White House, the president repeated his call for a far more extensive revamping of immigration law.

A broader measure, approved by the Senate last spring, would have not only enhanced **border** security but also provided for a guest worker program and the possibility of eventual citizenship for many illegal immigrants already in the country.

But that **bill** was successfully resisted by House Republicans, who feared a voter backlash against anything that smacked of "amnesty" for illegal immigrants. Those lawmakers portrayed the Senate **bill** as embracing just that, no matter what the measure's backers, including Mr. **Bush**, said to the contrary.

Eventually the president realized that a broad approach was dead for this election year, and he bowed to political reality and embraced the House concept, at least for the time being. On Sept. 29, just before its members headed home to campaign, the Senate approved construction of 700 miles of **fencing**, which the House had approved that month.

"I want to thank the members of Congress for their work on this important piece of legislation," Mr. **Bush** said Thursday, greeting several lawmakers by name. "Ours is a nation of immigrants. We're also a nation of law. Unfortunately, the United States has not been in complete control of its **borders** for decades, and therefore illegal immigration has been on the rise."

The new law also provides for more vehicle barriers, checkpoints and advanced technology to bolster **border** security. A previously enacted domestic security spending **bill** provides \$1.2 billion for the **fence** and the accompanying technology.

The **fence** idea has caused friction between the United States and Mexico, as was demonstrated again Thursday in Ottawa, where the Mexican president-elect, Felipe Calderon, condemned it.

"Humanity made a huge mistake by building the Berlin Wall, and I believe that today the United States is committing a grave error in building the wall on our **border**," said Mr. Calderon, who was meeting with the Canadian prime minister, Stephen Harper.

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Some of the legislation's critics say the **fence** -- actually several separate sections at a variety of places along the 2,000-mile **border** -- will not keep out people desperate to cross. A foreign policy adviser to Mr. Calderon, Arturo Sarukhan, told Canadian reporters on Wednesday that the **fence** would merely allow smugglers of illegal migrants to charge them more.

In calling for a broader immigration **overhaul**, Mr. **Bush** said again Thursday that his approach did not amount to amnesty.

"We must reduce pressure on our **border** by creating a temporary worker plan," he said. "Willing workers ought to be matched with willing employers to do jobs Americans are not doing for a temporary -- on a temporary -- basis. We must face the reality that millions of illegal immigrants are already here. They should not be given an automatic path to citizenship. That is amnesty. I oppose amnesty.

"There is a rational middle ground between granting an automatic path to citizenship for every illegal immigrant and a program of mass deportation, and I look forward to working with Congress to find that middle ground."

Any such search will almost surely have to await a new Congress. The chance that it would be taken up in a lame-duck session after the elections is considered remote.

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