

## **Bureaucracy stifles solid solution on immigration**

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### **Body**

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In the spring of 1998, Immigration Naturalization Service agents stormed into Vidalia onion country in search of illegal migrant workers as they picked onions for that year's crop. As agents showed up --- some in fatigues with guns strapped to their hips --- migrant workers, both legal and illegal, fled to the woods, leaving onions to sit in the fields and rot. It's an event that farmers in that community vividly remember --- like it was yesterday.

Today, eight years later, as the country grapples with how to stem the flow of illegal immigrants, Congress is nowhere near a common sense or effective approach to curbing the large numbers of illegal immigrants crossing our borders illegally.

Rather, many --- including The Atlanta Journal-Constitution's Cynthia Tucker, as she wrote in her July 9 column ("Chambliss, tag illegal hiring --- not citizenship" ) --- are advocating that we reward those who have come here illegally by giving them an easy pathway to receiving the most cherished asset in the world today: American citizenship.

Well, Congress went down that road in 1986, and those policies failed. The illegal population has doubled over the last two decades. We cannot afford to repeat the same mistakes again and that is why we need to ensure that employers, such as the farmers in onion country, have the tools to verify that the employees they hire are legal in the first place. After all, the vast majority of illegal immigrants are drawn to this country by the promise of a job, particularly in the field of agriculture.

Some in the news media like to recount the 1998 Vidalia onion raid and allege that because I denounced the agency for "bullying tactics," that I somehow do not support enforcement of the law.

Not only is this flat wrong, but it is irresponsible.

I stand by the position I have consistently held during my 12 years in Congress --- employers should comply with the law. At the same time, I have sought to streamline and modernize existing temporary worker programs so employers will use them. I have strongly advised Georgia's farmers to use the current temporary agricultural worker program (H-2A) even though it is cumbersome, expensive and subjects many farmers to numerous lawsuits. A

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large number do use the H-2A program because of my insistence while farmers in many other states across this country have abandoned it and embraced the illegal workforce.

Today, employers must utilize a paper-based verification system, and an employer who wants to hire a worker must examine one or more documents from a list of 29 different acceptable documents. If the document provided appears genuine, the employer is not allowed to solicit additional documents. Any request for more or different documents or a refusal to honor documents that appear genuine --- when we all know that high quality fraudulent documents are available today --- puts the employer at risk of being sued for employment discrimination. This turns common sense on its head.

Tucker says I come down on the side of "Big Business" on the issue of immigration. Actually, I come down on the side of hard-working employers --- and employees who want to obey the law but are handicapped by bureaucracy that folks such as Tucker want us to continue to live with.

The majority of Georgians who have contacted me are advocating exactly the opposite of what Tucker supports. They want a comprehensive approach that truly secures our borders and does not reward with citizenship those who break the law.

But apparently Tucker hasn't gotten the message. She just continues to be out of touch with Georgia and the real world.

\* Saxby Chambliss, a Republican, is Georgia's senior U.S. senator.

## Graphic

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Photo: Saxby Chambliss

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