

THE ABCs OF CIR

A Guide to Comprehensive Immigration Reform

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We live in a time when acronyms are used in the place of sentences to describe everything from WMD's (Weapons of Mass Destruction) to BFF's (Best Friends Forever). So is it any wonder why so many voters in the last presidential election are still unable to define CIR, albeit one of most important topics of our time? The components of CIR, or Comprehensive Immigration Reform, may take final form later this year and promise to affect each and every community across the country.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform has been kicked around in political campaigns for decades. You've heard the banter between political parties – from calls for closed borders and mass deportation to amnesty for all undocumented immigrants. But true Comprehensive Immigration Reform would be neither of those extremes, rather it would be a workable plan aimed at addressing each and every aspect of the currently broken immigration system.

The Basics

First, CIR will address the issue of approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants currently living and working in our communities, the majority of who are law-abiding, hardworking individuals who pay their taxes and contribute greatly to our society. Under comprehensive measures, a path would be created for these immigrants to step out of the shadows, and *earn* the privilege of legal status before applying for permanent residency. In order to remain in the U.S., immigrants would be required to register, "get to the back of the line", pay certain fines and any back taxes, learn English and remain law-abiding.

Second, CIR would restore already established laws and enhance border security. Most comprehensive plans would enforce effective inspections and screening practices, fair proceedings, efficient processing and define strategies that target lawbreaking employers. Appropriate border security practices would facilitate the cross-border flow of products and services, while focusing enforcement resources on those who do not follow the rule of law.

Equally as important, CIR would enhance the process for U.S. employers to hire essential workers through expanded recruiting programs. U.S. employers actively recruit worldwide for individuals in specialty occupations, including Scientists, Engineers, Mathematicians and Medical Professionals. These highly skilled people are the absolute best in their chosen field and help American businesses plant the seeds for future growth and stability. Since 2000, the quota of H-1B visas extended for this purpose has decreased substantially from 195,000 per year to 65,000, hampering U.S. companies' ability to innovate at a rate equal to or greater than the global competition. CIR would also expand legal channels for essential workers in low- or semi-skilled occupations to work in the U.S., beyond a season-by-season basis.

Common Misunderstandings

One of the most common myths about CIR is that jobs will be taken away from American workers as a result of measures like these. In truth, immigration actually supplements the U.S. labor force and helps create new jobs. First, in many circumstances, employers are required to demonstrate that they were unable to fill an open position with a qualified U.S. worker before an immigrant would be granted a work visa. Second, as a 2005 study from the Immigration Policy Center explains, "Immigrant workers who fill open positions further increase the demand for labor through their consumer purchases, investments and tax payments, all of which create new jobs."

Another misunderstanding related to CIR is that immigrants are a drain on the American economy. On the contrary, according to a recent Chicago Council of Foreign Relations report, the strength of our economy is extremely reliant upon immigration. The National Academy of Sciences reinforced the positive impact of immigration on the U.S. economy, concluding that immigrants have little negative effect on income and job opportunities of native-born Americans and add as much as \$10 billion annually to the economy.

The social, economic and political implications of Comprehensive Immigration Reform are many and far-reaching. The thorough approach currently being debated may finally create a culture of acceptance and inclusion while providing an environment for economic growth and homeland security. While pieces of the proposed plan may change to some extent in the months to come, we've learned from past administrations that complacency and "band-aid" tactics are ineffective, and CIR is a valid and critical issue of our time. PIO (Pass it on.)

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