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The Presidential Candidates on Immigration

As the Congress gets ready to debate a comprehensive immigration bill, the politics of the 2008 presidential campaign is playing a big role in the proceedings. Below is a look at what various candidates have said on the issue in the past. While many agree on the larger themes, disagreements about the details are likely to arise as the debate proceeds. - FARHANA HOSSAIN, BEN WERSCHKUL, and SARAH WHEATON

[The Democrats](#) | [The Republicans](#)

THE CANDIDATE

STATEMENTS ON THE BORDER FENCE AND BORDER SECURITY

STATEMENTS ON ILLEGAL ALIENS ALREADY IN THE COUNTRY

ACTIONS ON THE ISSUE

Joseph R. Biden Jr.
Democrat



“ [Favored Immigration Reform Act of 2006 because] first and foremost, this bill enhances our control over the border, allowing us to better deal with future illegal immigrants as well as drug traffickers and potential terrorists.”

-- [May 25, 2006](#)

“ [Favored Immigration Reform Act of 2006 because it offered] a rational and limited guest worker program with an electronic verification system for employers. Under its provisions, an employer could only hire a guest worker if the guest worker has a tamper-proof identification card and the employer can demonstrate that no American could be hired to do the job. If employers violated these terms, they would be subject to criminal prosecution..”

-- [May 25, 2006](#)

- Voted **yes** on the "Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006," which would have created a guest worker program and addressed border security issues.

[More information](#)

- Voted **yes** on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border.

[More information](#)

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Democrat



“ It is unconscionable to think that in a post-9/11 world we do not know precisely who is entering and exiting our country. Our homeland security requires that we know the identities of all people who cross our borders. In reforming our broken system, our efforts must be multifaceted and comprehensive.”

-- [March 8, 2006](#)

“ A comprehensive solution to our immigration crisis must include strengthening our borders.”

-- [May 1, 2007](#)

“ I'm in favor of comprehensive immigration reform, which includes tightening our border security, sanctioning employers to employ undocumented immigrants, helping our communities deal with the costs that come from illegal immigration, getting the 12 million or so immigrants out of the shadows. That's very important to me.

After 9/11, we've got to know who's in this country. And then giving them a chance to pay a fine, pay back taxes, learn English and stand in line to be eligible for a legal status in this country.”

-- [April 26, 2007](#)

- Co-sponsored the "Legal Immigrant Children's Health Improvement Act of 2007," which would lift the current waiting period of five years for federal health care benefits for legal immigrants.

[More information](#)

- Voted **yes** on the "Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006," which would have created a guest worker program and addressed border security issues.

[More information](#)

- Voted **yes** on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border.

[More information](#)

Chris Dodd
Democrat



“ I accept the basic idea of better border security....you need to be talking with [Mexico] to get cooperation, border security can't be on just one side of the border and then I believe we should have more meaningful penalties on employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers, that may do more than anything else.”

-- [May 3, 2007](#)

“ I don't like a blanket guest worker program. I could make a strong case in agriculture or in certain other areas...I'd like the ability to have a valve on that one. Demonstrate that I really have a problem and I'd be willing to loosen the valve but I'd be unwilling to have that as a general proposition because I'm still not convinced that raising minimum wages and doing other things, that Americans won't do certain work. So I'm mixed on that question. Then on the pathway to citizenship, how else do you deal with this? We aren't going to round up 11-12 million people, we're just not going to.”

-- [May 3, 2007](#)

- Voted **yes** on the "Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006," which would have created a guest worker program and addressed border security issues.

[More information](#)

- Voted **yes** on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border.

[More information](#)

John Edwards
Democrat



“ I do think that what's happening on our southern border is a mess and it's a very serious problem. America needs to, with both money technology and people, do a much more effective job of policing our border than we're doing now and we need to be aggressive about it, in my judgement. I think though, that has been married to a policy that embraces who we are, which is, we are a country of immigrants.”

-- [March 20, 2007](#)

“ I think [immigrants] ought to be allowed to earn American citizenship. Now I use the word, "earn" because I mean earn. I think if they came here illegally, then they ought to have to pay a fine...Another one that's a little more controversial is, but I believe it, is I think they ought to have to learn to speak English. I would allow a path for them to be able to earn American citizenship, and I think you have to do all these things together, not just one part of it.”

-- [March 10, 2007](#)

- **Co-Sponsored** the "Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act of 2003," which would have allowed states to give illegal immigrants in-state tuition for higher education and let the homeland security secretary confer legal resident status on some illegal immigrant students.

[More information](#)

- **Co-Sponsored** the "Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2001," which was drafted after Sept. 11 and tightened border security in the context of combating terrorism.

[More information](#)

Mike Gravel
Democrat



“ Our nation's borders should not be fenced nor should they be militarized. We can beef-up the Border Patrol and the Coast Guard, if need be.”

-- [May 21, 2006](#)

“ The 10-plus million illegal immigrants living here should be put on the road to citizenship, providing they do not run afoul of the law. To expel them would be national tragedy equaling the "Trail of Tears" of

“ Senator Gravel favors protecting our borders and monitoring the flow of illegal immigrants into our country.”
 -- gravel2008.us

President Jackson. ...However, the long-term solution—and that is what really concerns us—is the issue of helping Mexico and the Central American nations secure economic growth and prosperity at home”
 -- May 21, 2006

Dennis Kucinich
Democrat



“ I oppose giving the Department of Defense control over border security. In our democracy, it is critical that we preserve the distinction between our armed forces and domestic law enforcement. Also, I am concerned about the threat of vigilantes intimidating or attacking individuals at the border. Border security is a job for state and local authorities, not soldiers or vigilantes.”
 -- Kucinich.us

“ I am a strong supporter of the USA Family Act (HR 440). It offers immigrants a clear road map to legal status in the United States. Among other changes, it grants legal permanent residence to immigrants who have been living in the U.S. for five or more years.”
 -- Kucinich.us

- Voted **no** on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border.
[More information](#)
- Voted **no** on the "Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005," that made it a federal crime to live in the U.S. illegally and didn't provide any options for current illegal immigrants to gain legal status.
[More information](#)

Barack Obama
Democrat



“ We're going to have to secure our borders. And this past year, the Senate invested billions of dollars in improving border security. I think that's important because I think all Americans think that we should be able to regulate who comes in and out of this country in an orderly way, not only for the sake of our sovereignty, but also to avoid the hundreds of people who have been dying across the desert, the enormous costs that are placed on border states and border towns. I also think that we've got to be serious about employers' obligations to check to see whether somebody is here legally or not...There hasn't been a serious program of employer sanctions. That has to be put in place.”
 -- March 24, 2007

“ [We] have to recognize that we've got 12 million undocumented workers who are already here. Many of them living their lives alongside other Americans. Their kids are going to school. Many of the kids, in fact, were born in this country and are citizens. And so, it's absolutely vital that we bring those families out of the shadows and that we give them the opportunity to travel a pathway to citizenship. It's not automatic citizenship. It's not amnesty. They would have to pay a fine. They would have to not have engaged in any criminal activity. They would have to learn English. They would have to go to the back of the line so that they did not get citizenship before those persons who had come here legally.”
 -- March 24, 2007

- **Co-Sponsored** the "Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act of 2007," which would allow states to give illegal immigrants in-state tuition for higher education and let the homeland security secretary confer legal resident status on some illegal immigrant students.
- **Co-sponsored** the "Citizenship Promotion Act 2007," which would require the federal government to freeze the fee that legal immigrants pay for each application for services at current levels and called for \$80 million a year to promote citizenship.
[More information](#)
- Voted **yes** on the "Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006," which would have created a guest worker program and addressed border security issues.
[More information](#)
- Voted **yes** on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border.
[More information](#)

Bill Richardson
Democrat



“ Securing the border must come first -- but we must understand that building a fence will not in any way accomplish that objective. No fence ever built has stopped history and this one wouldn't either. The Congress should abandon the fence, lock, stock, and barrel...[t]his is what we should do: immediately put enough National Guard troops at the border to keep it covered until we can secure it with Border Patrol officers. That should take no longer than three years.”
 -- December 7, 2006

“ The McCain-Kennedy legislation passed by the Senate this year provided an excellent framework for a guest worker program: pay an application fee, undergo a medical examination and a background check, the initial work period would be three years and it could be extended for up to three more years, if you're out of work for more than 45 days you must return to your home country or last country of residence...[t]he number of guest workers allowed at any one time must be based upon the needs of the U.S. economy. The goal must be to meet demand for jobs that go unfilled by American citizens, and no more.”
 -- December 7, 2006

- As governor of New Mexico, implemented a policy to grant drivers licenses without regard to legal residency.
- As governor of New Mexico, was among the first to meet President Bush's request to secure the border with National Guard troops.

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Sam Brownback
Republican



“ What we need to do is secure the border with a fence, and then interior-wise, we need to make sure that that Social Security number means something. We already have a Social Security number...we don't need a new system and we don't need a new ID card.”
 -- May 3, 2007

“ we've got to somehow work together to see a work visa program that will allow people to get into a legal system, not an illegal system. I mean that's what people really get irritated about. It's not that people come into the country legally, it's that they come in illegally.”
 -- May 15, 2007

- **Co-Sponsored** and voted **yes** on the "Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006," which would have created a guest worker program and addressed border security issues.
[More information](#)
- Voted **yes** on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border.
[More information](#)

John McCain
Republican



“ One thing we would all agree on, the status quo is not acceptable. We have to secure our borders. But we also need a temporary worker program, and we have to dispose of the issue of 12 million people who are in this country illegally. This issue is an important and compelling one, and it begins with national security. But we also need to address it comprehensively.”

“ [W]e need to have a guest worker program....our proposal is basically you can get a tamper-proof visa after your job has been proven that it cannot be filled by an American citizen. Now, what do you do with the 11 million people that are already here?...[M]ake them earn citizenship because they have broken our laws....My friends, that's not amnesty. Amnesty is forgiveness. We're not forgiving

- **Co-Sponsored** the "Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act of 2007," which would allow states to give illegal immigrants in-state tuition for higher education and let the homeland security secretary confer legal resident status on some illegal immigrant students.
- **Co-Sponsored** and voted **yes** on the "Comprehensive Immigration Reform

-- [May 3, 2007](#) anything.”

-- [April 7, 2007](#)

Act of 2006,” which would have created a guest worker program and addressed border security issues.

[More information](#)

- Voted **yes** on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border.

[More information](#)

James Gilmore
Republican



“ You have to think about the borders. We have porous borders. It's creating the entire immigration problem. We have got a lot that we have to address in this country to make sure that we are secure, not just in the ports, but in the entire border of the United States.”

-- [Sept 13, 2006](#)

“ We have to get control of the situation. Then we can deal with the issue of immigration reform.”

-- [February 14, 2007](#)

Rudy Giuliani
Republican



“ So we need a fence. We need a technological fence; we need a tamper-proof ID card. And we need a way that people who are working in this country can come forward, sign up for the tamper-proof ID card, get in the database and start paying their way.”

-- [May 15, 2007](#)

“ If anybody is here illegally, they should never get to be put ahead of a line of people that are here legally. They should have to pay a penalty, because there should not be amnesty. It's a civil wrong. Civil wrongs are compensated by paying penalties. They should pay the back taxes. And if you ultimately find a way to make them citizens, then there should be a very, very strong requirement that they speak English, read English, write English, and understand American history.”

-- [March 23, 2007](#)

- As mayor of New York City, **filed a suit** in federal court challenging a provision in a welfare law that allowed city employees to turn in illegal immigrants who seek services like police protection, hospital care and public education.

[More information](#)

- As mayor of New York City, **denounced** a law that cut off Social Security benefits, food stamps and health benefits to legal immigrants who were not citizens and lobbied Congressmen to change it.

Mike Huckabee
Republican



“ I think this can't be brought to a rational discussion until we first bring security to the borders. I think that this has to be the very first step that the president takes, is secure the borders, physically or electronically so that you stop this porous situation where people come across at will. Until that happens, all of the discussion of what we need to be doing on this side with the existing immigrants becomes moot.”

-- [April 13, 2007](#)

“ We shouldn't have amnesty where we just say, "Fine, everybody's good, we're going to let it go." We should have a process where people can pay the penalties, step up and accept responsibility for not being here legally.

But here's the point. The objective is not to be punitive. The objective is to make things right. Right for us. Right for them.”

-- [February 7, 2007](#)

- **Sponsored** a resolution, adopted by the Southern Governors' Association, which, among other things, recommended implementing a farm labor system to import farm workers from Canada and Mexico.

- **Proposed** a bill that would have allowed children of undocumented immigrants who graduated high school to qualify to receive a state scholarship to attend an Arkansas college. That bill didn't pass the state legislature.

- As governor of Arkansas, **opposed** a proposal banning state-funded services to illegal immigrants.

Duncan Hunter
Republican



“ I built the border fence in San Diego. When I built that fence, we had massive illegal immigration across the border. We built the border fence; we reduced illegal immigration and smuggling of narcotics by more than 90 percent. And the crime rate in the city of San Diego fell by 50 percent... this administration has a case of the slows on border enforcement. If we have border enforcement, we will be able at that point to start to regulate the internal problem that we've got. Because...it's not just an immigration problem, it's a homeland security problem.”

-- [May 15, 2007](#)

“ Let me just say, right now we have a house with no sides on it. The guest worker program is how you adjust a front door. We've got a house that's got a front door and it doesn't have any sides. That means people stream across the border. We had 155,000 people come in last year from Mexico-who...weren't citizens of Mexico. They came from every country in the world. So you have to have some control of the border before any meaningful change in policy can be made.”

-- October 30, 2006

- Played a **'leading role'** in the construction of a 14-mile double fence on the U.S.-Mexico border in San Diego.

- **Co-sponsored** and voted **yes** on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border.

[More information](#)

- Voted **yes** on the "Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005," that made it a federal crime to live in the U.S. illegally and didn't provide any options for current illegal immigrants to gain legal status.

[More information](#)

Ron Paul
Republican



“ The talk must stop. We must secure our borders now. A nation without secure borders is no nation at all. It makes no sense to fight terrorists abroad when our own front door is left unlocked.”

-- [ronpaul2008.com](#)

“ We must do whatever it takes to control entry into our country before we undertake complicated immigration reform proposals.”

-- [ronpaul2008.com](#)

- Voted **yes** on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border.

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- Voted **yes** on the "Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005," that made it a federal crime to live in the U.S. illegally and didn't provide any options for current illegal immigrants to gain legal status.

[More information](#)

Mitt Romney
Republican



“ My view, you have to secure the border, number one, have an employment verification system, number two, and number three, say to those that are there illegally, get in line with everybody else; you're not going to have a special doorway, any

“ The first thing I'd like them to do is to register, so I know how many there are, and what their circumstances are. ... And on that basis, we can see who would receive temporary employment visas and who would instead be required to return home.”

- As governor of Massachusetts, **opposed** giving driver's licenses to illegal immigrants.

- **Vetoed** a bill allowing the children of illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition at the state's universities.

particular advantage, by having come here illegally, to become a permanent resident.”

-- [May 15, 2007](#)

“There's no question as we deal with the issue of immigration, having a national special card that indicates a person's name, date, birth date, biographic information, and an indication of their work status will allow us to know who's here legally, who's not, who can work and who cannot.”

-- [May 3, 2007](#)

-- [March 17, 2007](#)

• **Signed an agreement** with federal authorities in Dec. 2006, allowing Massachusetts State Police troopers to arrest and seek deportation of suspected illegal aliens they encounter over the course of their normal duties.

Tom Tancredo
Republican



“I want to see our capacity on that Southern border up to about 20,000 — that would be a combination of both troops, but actively involved with protecting the border.”

-- [June 5, 2006](#)

“If you're in this country illegally, the penalty, yes, is deportation. And there are easier ways to handle it. We can by attrition, that is, not giving people jobs if they're here illegally. Millions will return home voluntarily. Others that don't, you have to deport. Because you know why? It is the law. Mr. President, hello. It's the law. Do you understand those words?”

-- [March 15, 2007](#)

• **Co-sponsored** and voted **yes** on the "Secure Fence Act of 2006," which created 700 miles of new fence along the US/Mexico border.

[More information](#)

• Voted **yes** on the "Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005," that made it a federal crime to live in the U.S. illegally and didn't provide any options for current illegal immigrants to gain legal status.

[More information](#)

Tommy Thompson
Republican



“We have to continue building the barrier. We have to have controlled access.”

-- April 7, 2007

“The truth of the matter is, we have laws on the books, and you should not be able to have amnesty. ... I think what they really need to do is, they have to go back to their country and apply. They've got to go to the back of the line and allow those individuals who come into this country legally really to have preference..”

-- Feb 5, 2007

• **Signed** a Midwestern Governors' Conference resolution which called for the repeal of restrictive border entry-exit control systems with Canada because of its "adverse impact" on trade and cross-border traffic.