

# Time To Close America's 'Back Door'

A Former California Governor Urges Congress to Avoid Another Amnesty and Enact a Security Barrier Across the Southwest U.S. Border

By Gov. PETE WILSON

Congress at long last seems aware of the urgent need to deal with on-going massive illegal immigration.

The bad news is they may well get it wrong again—and powerful forces are at work to help them get it wrong.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is putting on a major campaign to persuade the American people to press Congress to grant amnesty to millions of illegal immigrants.

Again.

Congress did so in 1986—to prevent further illegal immigration!

Prevent it? Amnesty—the granting of citizenship to persons who have entered the country illegally and remain here illegally—is instead a powerful incentive to continued massive illegal immigration. It sends a clear message to those contemplating illegal entry: Go ahead and do it; then be patient and, one day, you will be rewarded by an Act of Congress that transforms you from illegal to legal. It is tantamount to repeal of our immigration laws and throwing open our borders.

So why is the Chamber urging Congress to repeat this past mistake? The Chamber's answer is: America's economy depends upon the labor of illegal immigrants to do the jobs Americans won't do. That may be true of the seasonal harvests that require migration to follow crop seasons.

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But construction? Or gardening? Or working in restaurants? Or as domestics? Who did these jobs before the flood of illegal immigrants arrived, willing to do them for less money?

Americans, of course, many of them naturalized citizens eager to assimilate into American society after patiently completing the years long process of naturalization.



**Former California Governor  
Pete Wilson**

The U.S. admits some 700,000 persons each year as legal immigrants seeking to become naturalized American citizens. If indeed foreign labor is required to fill certain jobs, then let those jobs be filled by legal immigrants, or—if needed—from truly “temporary” workers whose stay is monitored and who are required to return to their country.

The *Wall Street Journal* welcomes illegal immigrants as energizing market-driven competition that allows American business to offer lower prices to American consumers. But the Journal blithely ignores the fact that these lower prices

are heavily subsidized by American taxpayers—especially state taxpayers who provide federally mandated healthcare and education for immigrants and pay for the incarceration of alien felons. I wonder if the Journal has calculated the cost to naturalized American taxpayers of this tax burden they pay from wages depressed by the “competition” they are subsidizing.

But far and away the most important cost paid by all Americans for decades of federal neglect is its very serious undermining of the rule of law and our nation's tradition of social assimilation. How can we demand respect for and obedience to

the rule of law from our young people and from new citizens when the federal government is so flagrantly complicit in this on-going massive violation of federal law? Federal failure to enforce our immigration laws and to control our borders has produced an estimated 12 million illegal immigrants living in ethnic enclaves—many not speaking English, working at menial jobs but not otherwise participating in our culture, adding billions to state taxpayers' bills—and *not* becoming Americans.

The solution is not to now declare illegal immigrants to be “guest workers” under a radical re-definition of that term. Historically guest worker programs provided only temporary seasonal employment to foreign workers who were explicitly required at job's end to return to their country of origin. But the McCain-Kennedy bill and others now pending in the United States Senate offer those who have entered the country illegally “a path to legalization.”

We must instead offer the precious prize of citizenship to those who have earned it—to those who have chosen to be Americans, chosen naturalization, chosen to assume duties as well as rights, chosen to give undivided allegiance to their adopted land.

This debate is not about race. Those who assert or imply that opposition to illegal immigration is racist are either seriously deluded or are themselves demagogues shamelessly playing the race card. Those who label opponents as “anti-immigrant” or “nativist” falsely portray them as opposed to legal as well as illegal immigration, cynically using the labels as code words insinuating racism.

No, the debate is not about race. What it is all about is our culture—our institutions of democracy and ordered liberty which depend upon the rule of law. This nation of immigrants (including three of my four grandparents) continues to require not only the energy and drive but the dedication and loyalty of naturalized foreign born as well as native born Americans to sustain and renew those institutions which are the essential safeguards of “liberty and justice for all.”

The renowned President Emeritus of Notre Dame University, Father Theodore Hesburgh, served as Chairman of a Presidential commission on illegal immigration. In reporting the findings and conclusions of the commission, Hesburgh stated that to keep open “the front door” of legal immigration it is necessary to close “the back door” of illegal entry.

Father Hesburgh was absolutely right. He had the wisdom and the courage to speak the truth notwithstanding the empathy he felt, as do I, for illegals struggling to come to this land of freedom and opportunity. Whatever his compassion for them, he knew the back door must be closed.

Fairness demands it—fairness to legal immigrants and fairness to taxpayers. The need for assimilation of legal immigrants to be participants in and contributors to their adopted society demands it. And the need for shared purpose—for the common bond of not conformity but

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loyalty to the shared basic principles, values and institutions that forged a nation of united states and of very different but united peoples—demands it.

But we are in real and increasing danger of losing our shared purpose and sense of national community... because we have left Father Hesburgh's back door wide open.

Twelve years ago, after the passage of California's Proposition 187, I predicted that federal failure to control our nation's borders would, if allowed to continue, produce a flood of illegal immigration that would spill over from the seven states then suing the federal government to the smaller states of the South and the Midwest. It has. The illegal population of America has almost doubled in less than a decade.

The time has long since arrived to close America's back door. It had come long before 9/11 made it a far more urgent necessity. Increasing the inadequate budget and staffing of the Border Patrol helped to reduce the volume, but not nearly enough.

What is required to prevent continued massive

illegal immigration is a physical barrier like that in Israel which has so effectively reduced suicide bombing attacks there. Shrill voices will protest so politically incorrect a proposal. Others will decry as unaffordable the estimated cost of \$6 billion to construct only a southern barrier, ignoring the fact that the one-time cost of construction would be far less than the annually recurring much greater and growing costs to state taxpayers of providing expensive services to our growing population of 12- million illegal immigrants. Some sage will doubtless point out that publication of the decision to build such a barrier will set off a great rush to the borders to get across before the barrier is in place.

Probably. But not after it *is* in place. Not even if Congress is so misguided as to pass another amnesty thereafter. It is however a very good reason to begin and to complete the barrier as soon as possible. Until it is in place, illegal immigration will continue relentlessly...until perhaps one day

ironically the number of illegals who have become legal through amnesty may have grown so large that they will demand that Congress seal the borders and terminate America's policy of generous legal immigration. After all, only so many can join the public employee union (which have organized and paid for the recent pro-amnesty demonstrations) before America's managed economy and shrinking opportunity will seem little better than what they left behind and much less than what attracted them here.

For sure, some outraged but confused critic will charge that such a barrier will be the moral equivalent of the Berlin Wall. No. It will not, as did the Berlin Wall, restrain those inside from leaving. Instead, it will simply require those who seek to enter the United States to do so legally, in the sunlight rather than the dark of night. And as in Israel, it will help enormously to reduce the threat of illegal entry by terrorists.

That's the right way to come to America. ■



**GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS** — The Israeli security fence, enacted to minimize attacks from Palestinian suicide bombers, is the sort of physical barrier that is required to seal the borders between Mexico and the U.S. Southwest from the continued flow of illegal aliens, argues former California Gov. Pete Wilson.