

# Open Borders: A Truly Bipartisan Effort

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In 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which Rep. Romano Mazzoli (D-KY) and Sen. Alan Simpson (R-WY) co-sponsored. It granted amnesty to about 3 million illegal aliens, mostly from Mexico.

IRCA passed through the U.S. Senate with a 63-24 vote; it passed in the U.S. House of Representatives with a 238-173 majority. Reagan signed the bill into law on November 6, 1986. Remember, at the time, the Republicans controlled the Senate, while the Democrats controlled the House.

Prior to the act's passage, we were told that the country's illegal alien population was only about 1.5 million.

Though the American people were told that the Simpson-Mazzoli Act would correct our "broken immigration system," while ensuring that our borders would be defended, it quickly became obvious that the law would never deliver on either promise.

In his diary entry for October 16, 1986, President Reagan penned what sounded very much like the same political rhetoric we hear today:

Al Simpson came by to see if he had my support. After 5 years of trying (during which I've been on his side) the House finally passed his immigration bill. They have one or two amendments we could do without but even if the Senate in conference cannot get them out, I'll sign it. It's high time we regained control of our borders and his bill will do this.

Does anyone really believe that we actually "regained control of our borders"?

In 2007, *National Review* published comments made by Reagan's former U.S. Attorney General Ed Meese on the 1986 amnesty bill:

In the mid-80's, many members of Congress — pushed by the Democratic majority in the House and the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy — advocated amnesty for long-settled illegal immigrants. President Reagan considered it reasonable to adjust the status of what was then a relatively small population, and I supported his decision.

In exchange for allowing aliens to stay, he decided, border security and enforcement of immigration laws would be greatly strengthened — in particular, through sanctions against employers who hired illegal immigrants. If jobs were the attraction for illegal immigrants, then cutting off that option was crucial.

Beyond this, most illegal immigrants who could establish that they had resided in America continuously for five years would be granted temporary resident status, which could be upgraded to permanent residency after 18 months and, after another five years, to citizenship.

Note that this path to citizenship was not automatic. Indeed, the legislation stipulated several conditions: immigrants had to pay application fees, learn to speak English, understand American civics, pass a medical exam, and register for military selective service. Those with convictions for a felony or three misdemeanors were ineligible.

While much attention has been given to the fact that President Reagan granted amnesty to illegal aliens in 1986, precious little is ever given to the multitude of amnesty measures which President Bill Clinton signed into law.

In 1994, an amnesty for illegal aliens [Section 245 (i)] was added to the fiscal year (FY) 1995 Commerce, Justice, State Appropriations bill. The rolling amnesty ended on September 30, 1997, and resulted in 578,000 illegal aliens being granted permanent legal status.

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The Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA) of 1997 granted amnesty to 1,000,000 illegal aliens from Central America.

The Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act (HRIFA) of 1998 granted amnesty to 125,000 illegal aliens from Haiti.

In 2000, amnesty was also granted to about 400,000 illegal aliens who claimed they should have received it, but did not under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Numbers USA noted,

This amnesty was the result of an agreement between the Clinton White House, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, and Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert. The 'late amnesty' allowed all illegal aliens who had been part of lawsuits claiming that they have been illegal aliens since before 1982 and should have received amnesty under the 1986 IRCA amnesty but for various reasons were denied, to renew their request for the amnesty.

The Legal Immigration Family Equity Act of 2000 removed deportation orders and/or granted permanent legal residency to an estimated 900,000 illegal aliens.

Of course, Clinton could not have rewarded those who chose to come here illegally without the help of a Republican Congress, as the GOP took control of both houses in the 1994 midterms and would hold them for the next 12 years.

For conservatives, Newt Gingrich's so-called "Republican Revolution" appears to have been less of a revolution and more of a surrender.

Furthermore, in the first two years of the Trump administration, the Republicans controlled both houses of Congress, yet chose not to vote on construction for the much-need border wall, nor did they do take any other legislative action to curb illegal immigration.

However, the Republicans now blame the Democrats for the border crisis.

It would seem that when it comes to encouraging illegal immigration, it is truly a bipartisan effort. ■



On November 6, 1986, President Ronald Reagan, accompanied by congressional leaders, including Sen. Alan Simpson (R-WY), fourth from right; Vice President Bush, third from right; Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-SC), second from right; and Rep. Romano Mazzoli (D-KY), right, signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) into law. "The Act required employers to attest to their employees' immigration status; made it illegal to hire or recruit illegal immigrants knowingly; legalized certain seasonal agricultural undocumented immigrants; and legalized undocumented immigrants who entered the United States before January 1, 1982 and had resided there continuously with the penalty of a fine, back taxes due, and admission of guilt; candidates were required to prove that they were not guilty of crimes, that they were in the country before January 1, 1982, and that they possessed at least a minimal knowledge about U.S. history, government, and the English language."

Source: <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/99/s1200/summary>