

(Washington DC) In response to President Bush's visit to the U.S.-Mexico border in Laredo, Texas, Congressman Charlie Gonzalez issued the following statement:

"I am encouraged that the President continues to urge Republicans to implement comprehensive immigration reform instead of the House immigration bill, which is impractical and harmful to our nation's economy. Moreover, the House bill panders to the far right Republican base, plays on the fears of Americans and uses the immigration issue for political gain instead of promoting sound immigration policy.

If we are serious about addressing immigration, border security is only one component to solving this complex problem. Yet, deploying large numbers of troops for extended tours along the border will drain military resources. So, we should be looking at increasing funding for Border Patrol agents and utilizing the most hi-tech means available to secure our southern border.

We must also find and punish employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers, which will ultimately reduce the demand for these workers and decrease movement across our southern border. It is encouraging that the President recently recognized the need for stronger employer sanctions as a key piece of immigration reform.

Stiff fines will discourage employers from breaking the law, yet this must be coupled with enforcement. The Bush administration has not made finding lawbreaking employers a priority and the number of arrests has fallen dramatically from the Clinton administration.

Moreover, deporting 12 million undocumented people is simply not feasible as Republicans have admitted. Therefore, comprehensive immigration reform must contain provisions that would provide a path to citizenship for those willing to go to the back of the line, pay a fine and back-taxes and move through the system.

Democrats are interested in a genuine dialogue on immigration reform so we can pass a bill that will address the entire issue. It is my hope that President Bush can convince members of his party that Americans demand and deserve comprehensive reform."

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