

September 11, 2006 With the November elections looming, politics is taking priority over sensible policy. It appears congressional leaders have no intention of addressing the issue of illegal immigration this year, preferring not to tackle such a thorny problem for fear of angering voters one way or another. But this is a mistake. The American people want something done about illegal immigration now-- not next year. All sides in the immigration debate agree that the current, "Don't ask, don't tell," policy cannot continue. That's why I am joining several of my colleagues in demanding that the Senate vote this month on a border security bill already passed by the House earlier this year. I truly believe border security is the most important issue for millions of Americans. Both the Bush administration and congressional leadership have promised to spend the next two months addressing national security issues. But real national security cannot be achieved unless and until our borders are physically secured. It's as simple as that. All the talk about fighting terror and making America safer is meaningless without border security. It makes no sense to seek terrorists abroad if our own front door is left unlocked. Although the border security bill already passed by the House is a good start, Congress needs to pass broader legislation this year based on the following simple points: First, physically secure our borders and coastlines. We must have control over who enters our country before we even begin to consider complicated immigration reform proposals. Second, enforce visa rules on those already in the country. Immigration officials must track visa holders and deport individuals who overstay their visas or otherwise violate U.S. law. This is especially important when we recall that some of the 9/11 terrorists had expired visas. Third, reject amnesty. If we reward lawbreakers who enter this country illegally with citizenship, then any new laws Congress might pass likewise can be ignored. Reform must begin with a new mentality that immigration laws will be enforced. Fourth, end welfare-state incentives for illegals. Americans are quick to welcome immigrants who simply wish to work hard and make a better life for themselves. But taxpayers cannot continue to pay when illegal immigrants use hospitals, clinics, schools, roads, and social services. Fifth, end birthright citizenship. As long as illegal immigrants know their children born here will be citizens, the perverse incentive to sneak into this country remains strong. Citizenship involves more than the mere location of one's birth. Finally, completely overhaul the legal immigration process. The current system is incoherent and unfair. Legal immigrants from all countries should face the same rules and waiting periods. If we keep these points in mind, immigration reform does not need to be complicated or expensive. It does, however, need to happen this year.