

August 8, 2005 More and more of my constituents are asking me when Congress will address the problem of illegal immigration. The public correctly perceives that neither political party has the courage to do what is necessary to prevent further erosion of both our border security and our national identity. As a result, immigration may be the sleeper issue that decides the 2008 presidential election. The problem of illegal immigration will not be solved easily, but we can start by recognizing that the overwhelming majority of Americans- including immigrants- want immigration reduced, not expanded. Amnesty for illegal immigrants is not the answer. Millions of people who broke the law by entering, staying, and working in our country illegally should not be rewarded with a visa. Why should lawbreakers obtain a free pass, while those seeking to immigrate legally face years of paperwork and long waits for a visa? We must end welfare state subsidies for illegal immigrants. Some illegal immigrants-- certainly not all-- receive housing subsidies, food stamps, free medical care, and other forms of welfare. This alienates taxpayers and breeds suspicion of immigrants, even though the majority of them work very hard. Without a welfare state, we would know that everyone coming to America wanted to work hard and support himself. Our current welfare system also encourages illegal immigration by discouraging American citizens to take low-wage jobs. This creates greater demand for illegal foreign labor. Welfare programs and minimum wage laws create an artificial market for labor to do the jobs Americans supposedly won't do. Illegal immigrants also place a tremendous strain on social entitlement programs. Under a proposed totalization agreement with Mexico, millions of illegal immigrants will qualify for Social Security and other programs- programs that already threaten financial ruin for America in the coming decades. Adding millions of foreign citizens to the Social Security, Medicare, and disability rolls will only hasten the inevitable day of reckoning. Economic considerations aside, we must address the cultural aspects of immigration. The vast majority of Americans welcome immigrants who want to come here, work hard, and build a better life. But we rightfully expect immigrants to show a sincere desire to become American citizens, speak English, and assimilate themselves culturally. All federal government business should be conducted in English. More importantly, we should expect immigrants to learn about and respect our political and legal traditions, which are rooted in liberty and constitutionally limited government. Our most important task is to focus on effectively patrolling our borders. With our virtually unguarded borders, almost any determined individual- including a potential terrorist- can enter the United States. Unfortunately, the federal government seems more intent upon guarding the borders of other nations than our own. We are still patrolling Korea's border after some 50 years, yet ours are more porous than ever. It is ironic that we criticize Syria for failing to secure its border with Iraq while our own borders, particularly to the south, are no better secured than those of Syria. We need to allocate far more of our resources, both in terms of money and manpower, to securing our borders and coastlines here at home. This is the most critical task before us, both in terms of immigration problems and the threat of foreign terrorists. Unless and until we secure our borders, illegal immigration and the problems associated with it will only increase. If we took some of the steps I have outlined here - eliminating the welfare state and securing our borders - we could effectively address the problem of illegal immigration in a manner that would not undermine the freedom of American citizens. Sadly, it appears we are moving toward policies like a national ID that diminish our liberties. Like gun control, these approaches only punish the innocent, as criminals will always find a way around the law.