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Border Communities Express Concerns with Bill Passed in US Senate as Troop Deployment at the Border Increases

Senate legislation is reprehensive not comprehensive

Arizona-Sonora Border-- Today the US Senate approved an immigration reform package containing a limited program to regularize select undocumented immigrants while simultaneously imposing tougher border policies. This reform is neither comprehensive, nor does it present real solutions to the immigration phenomenon.

After the House passage of HR 4437 last December, it was rumored that the Senate debate would be considerably more rational and reasonable. However, if the provision of access to permanent residency for those in the U.S for more five years is removed from the Senate bill 2611, it will closely parallel the House Sensenbrenner bill.

Much like the reactionary immigration reform debate in the House, the restrictionist and anti-immigrant forces in the Senate were able to include a series of politically-motivated provisions that are based on ideology rather than practicality such as the construction of a “triple fence” at the border, the deployment of the National Guard in our communities, local authorities enforcing immigration laws, applicants for permanent residence paying an additional \$ 500 fee for border security on top of the original penalty of \$2,700, the culturally insensitive “English Only” mandates, among other regressive provisions.

In spite of all the rhetoric of safety and security, the Senate bill 2611 and the House bill 4437 will actually create more insecurity and undermine the safety of millions within the US. Extreme enforcement measures have already resulted in an ongoing human rights crisis on the border, including increasing numbers of migrants taking more and more risks to enter the country, shocking annual deaths rates of migrants crossing the border, and escalating violations of human and constitutional rights of migrants as well as the residents living on the US-Mexico border – a region that is home to over 6 million people on the U.S. side alone.

The walling off of the U.S. has become both literal and figurative in the sense that developing policies in isolation from other countries and from domestic regions that have a stake and role in the migration debate will inherently result in short-lived and ineffective policy making. Unless decision-makers are prepared to keep revisiting and repackaging the same failed strategies every ten years, comprehensive legislation must address the root causes and broadest social impacts of the immigration phenomenon.

A truly comprehensive bill would encompass: a) Trans-national process and agreements that include discussions of economic trade agreements, economic policies, immigration and refugee policies; b) Border enforcement protocols and practices that include mechanisms for accountability, including ongoing training and certification, creation of an independent auditor and monitoring board, transparent and effective complaint processes, community consultation, and compliance with environmental protections; c) Provisions to uphold the integrity of law enforcement jurisdiction and divisions of labor such that local police do not enforce immigration policies.

While the conference committee begins deliberations on a final bill, border communities are launching a series of responses. Last week, vigils were held commemorating the 9th anniversary of military troops' killing of Ezequiel Hernandez on the Texas border. On Tuesday 23rd the City Council of El Paso passed a unanimous resolution to reject militarization of the Border and called for comprehensive immigration reform.

Furthermore, in coming weeks local officials, community groups, businesses and others from the US-Mexico border will issue a broad declaration intended to lay the groundwork for a new vision for the US-Mexico border region that will be delivered to policy-makers in Washington, D.C.

**NO to the Militarization of Our Border:
Not at the Cost of Our Community**

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