



We Need Immigration Reform

By John C. Wester, Catholic bishop of Salt Lake City, Utah, and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration

Upon signing into law SB 1070, the Arizona immigration bill which would make enforcement targets of anyone looking foreign-born in that state, Gov. Jan Brewer complained: "We in Arizona have waited patiently for Washington to act. But decades of federal inaction and misguided policy have created a dangerous and unacceptable situation. "

I would agree, but with an amendment. I would say that all Americans have waited for the federal government to find a solution to the problem of illegal immigration. They have acted, for sure, but not in the right way and not for the right reasons. I would also agree that the situation is dangerous and unacceptable, but that Arizona's SB 1070 makes it worse, not better.

The federal government since 2002 has spent over \$100 billion on immigration enforcement initiatives. This amounts to a doubling of Border Patrol agents to almost 20,000, nearly 700 miles of border fencing, a failed "virtual" fence costing billions, and a tripling of detention beds.

This is not to mention the manpower, weaponry, and other resources spent on immigration enforcement raids over the past several years, used to whisk away powerless mothers and fathers from their even more powerless children.

Yet, despite this strategy, along with its tragic human consequences, there has been no sustainable progress. In fact, the number of undocumented has risen over 50 percent in the past ten years, from 7 million in the 2000 Census to 11 million today.

To borrow from a nursery rhyme, all of the King's horses and all of the King's men have not put our immigration system back together again.

Arizona's SB 1070 is not an affirmation that enforcement measures alone are the right approach to illegal immigration, but a confirmation that enforcement-only tactics have not worked. It should be a wake-up call--a cry from the desert, if you will--to our national leaders that another approach is needed.





Despite its controversy, comprehensive immigration reform is the best way to secure the border and make us a safer nation.

It is only logical. Bringing 11 million undocumented persons out of the shadows to register with the government, which is what immigration reform would do, would eliminate the desire or need for the Arizona law. Creating more legal avenues for migrant workers to come and work in our country, another reform component, would give law enforcement officials more time and money to pursue those who are a real threat--drug smugglers, human traffickers, and would-be terrorists. It would also help meet our future labor needs.

Such reforms would take undocumented persons out of the enforcement equation, making it easier to secure our communities and border. It also would restore the rule of law in a manner that affirms both our national security interests and our nation's long-term commitment to basic human rights, rights which are threatened by laws such as SB 1070.

The immigration reform framework recently unveiled by several key Senators suggests a cry from the desert may have been heard and help is on the way. Although somewhat heavy on the usual enforcement methods, among some other flaws, the framework is a good starting point and contains several necessary and overdue changes to our employment and family immigration laws. President Obama and senators on both sides of the aisle, including Arizona's two senators, should actively engage the process as the best path toward a secure border and viable immigration system.

The real message from the passage of SB 1070 is that the country is growing impatient with the political posturing in Washington and wants our leaders to work together and confront this national challenge. Throwing money at the problem and waiting for the next election cycle are not acceptable. As Gov. Brewer might agree, what would help Arizona, as well as the nation, is a solution, not business as usual.

Comprehensive immigration reform is that solution, and must be enacted immediately. Without it, other States will start taking the law, and the Constitution, into their own hands.

Next Week – Bishop Answer Reader’s Tough Questions about Immigration

