

US Citizenship Act of 2021: Economic Growth and Stronger Labor Force

The US Citizenship Act strengthens our economy and protects workers

The U.S. economy depends on immigrant workers.

- Immigrants are a growing part of the American labor force, with foreign-born workers making up 17% of the work force and undocumented immigrants comprising approximately 4.4%.
- An estimated five million undocumented workers are serving in essential roles as front-line workers during the pandemic – from healthcare to transportation to agriculture to food services and delivery. They have risked their lives under trying circumstances to help serve and protect American communities in a time of crisis.
- Immigrant workers are represented in diverse sectors of the U.S. economy, including service occupations, healthcare, construction and maintenance, production and transportation, management, sales, information technology, and high-tech manufacturing.

Immigration Boosts Our Economy

- Fixing our broken immigration system would **boost our economy and help all workers** by increasing the worker productivity, creating more jobs, improving wages of all workers, and reducing the deficit.
- The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that the 2013 bipartisan Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act (S. 744) would **increase real Gross Domestic Product** relative to current law projections by \$700 billion in 2023 and \$1.4 trillion in 2033.
- CBO also found that the legislation would **increase the labor force** by 3.5 percent in 2023 and 5 percent in 2033, which will boost capital investment and lead to increased **productivity and higher overall average wages**.
- According to New American Economy, approximately 3.2 million immigrants run their own businesses, making up one in every five entrepreneurs in the country and immigrant-owned businesses employed almost **8 million American workers and generated \$1.3 trillion in total sales**.

Immigration Reform Protects American Workers

- The only way to stop the race to the bottom in wages and standards is for working people to stand together for **stronger worker protections**.
- The entire workforce suffers when unscrupulous employers have the power and ability to threaten workers with deportation for exercising their labor rights and are infrequently held liable for labor law violations.

- Instead of deporting immigrants, we need to put them on a path to citizenship. Only then will all working people have rights on the job and be able to exercise them without fear of retaliation.

The US Citizenship Act stimulates our economy by boosting worker productivity, retaining U.S.-educated STEM graduates, and improving wages. The bill:

- **Grows our economy.** It clears the employment-based immigrant visa backlog and alleviates lengthy wait times for individuals by eliminating employment-based per country limits. It also exempts students qualified to pursue a full course of study at a U.S. institution of higher education from demonstrating “nonimmigrant intent,” and increases the annual number of immigrant visas for lower-skilled jobs from 10,000 to 40,000. This will expand opportunities for people to obtain green cards to work in the dairy, meat and poultry processing industries, as well as in childcare and elder care.
- **Makes it easier for graduates of U.S. universities with advanced STEM degrees to stay in the United States and contribute their expertise to our economy.** It exempts individuals with a doctoral degree in a field involving science, technology, engineering, or mathematics from an accredited United States institution of higher education from the numerical caps on visas so they can stay here to help the U.S. build and compete.
- **Stimulates regional economic development.** It gives DHS authority to establish a 5-year pilot program to allow any county or municipal executive to [petition for additional immigrant visas](#) to support the region’s economic development strategy, provided employers in those regions certify there are available jobs and that there are no workers to fill them.

The U.S. Citizenship Act helps create a more level playing field in the labor market and strengthens worker protections. The bill:

- **Protects workers from exploitation and retaliation.** It creates a commission to ensure that employers have the tools to verify their workers’ employment status and requires DHS and DOL to establish a task force that includes employer, labor and civil rights organizations to make recommendations on how to improve the employment verification process while protecting the rights of all workers.
- **Holds employers responsible for labor law violations.** It clarifies that workers, regardless of immigration status, are covered by labor and employment law and creates a new Labor Law Enforcement Account for the Secretary of Labor to ensure compliance with workplace laws through fines obtained from random audits of employers with a history of significant employment or unauthorized workers or nonimmigrant workers. The bill also provides overtime protections to farm workers and increases penalties for violations of the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Workers Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act.
- Business leaders, economists and American workers agree – we must fix our broken immigration system. At stake is a stronger, more dynamic, and faster growing economy that will foster job creation, higher productivity and wages, and entrepreneurship.

U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021: Family Reunification

The U.S. Citizenship Act restores humanity to our immigration system by prioritizing family unity.

Reuniting families and providing long-term stability is a core American value.

- Too often, our immigration system keeps families apart. The U.S. Citizenship Act seeks to reunify families and align our immigration system with our values as a country.
- An estimated 3.76 million people with approved family-sponsored petitions are waiting for an immigrant visa to become available, sometimes up to 20 years to reunify lawfully with their family members in the United States.
- Approximately 1.6 million undocumented immigrants are married to U.S. Citizens and an estimated 4.4 million U.S. citizen children have at least one undocumented parent. The US Citizenship Act provides a clear pathy to citizenship for these individuals.

The U.S. Citizenship Act prioritizes keeping families together and reunifying those who have been kept apart by an arcane immigration system. The bill:

- **Creates an earned roadmap to citizenship for undocumented individuals.** The bill allows undocumented individuals to apply for temporary legal status, with the ability to apply for green cards after five years if they pass criminal and national security background checks and pay their taxes. Dreamers, TPS holders, and immigrant farmworkers who meet specific requirements are eligible for green cards immediately under the legislation. After three years, all green card holders who pass additional background checks and demonstrate knowledge of English and U.S. civics can apply to become citizens. Applicants must be physically present in the United States on or before January 1, 2021. The Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) may waive the presence requirement for those deported on or after January 20, 2017 who were physically present for at least three years prior to removal for family unity and other humanitarian purposes. Lastly, the bill further recognizes America as a nation of immigrants by changing the word “alien” to “noncitizen” in our immigration laws.
- **Keeps families together.** The bill reforms the family-based immigration system by clearing backlogs, recapturing unused visas, eliminating lengthy wait times, and increasing per-country visa caps. It also eliminates the so-called “3 and 10-year bars,” and other provisions that keep families apart. Lastly, the bill allows immigrants with approved family-sponsorship petitions to join family in the United States on a temporary basis while they wait for green cards to become available.

The U.S. Citizenship Act recognizes all families. The bill:

- **Eliminates discrimination in the immigration system.** It creates a new definition of spouse to include permanent partners and eliminates discrimination facing LGBTQ+ families by permitting citizens and LPRs in binational same-sex relationships to sponsor their permanent partners for immigration to the United States and to serve as qualifying relatives for other immigration benefits and purposes. The bill also extends automatic

citizenship to children with at least one U.S. citizen parent, regardless of the biological relationship to that parent.

- **Protects orphans, widows, and children, and provides equal treatment to stepchildren.** It expands current protections to ensure that the death of a sponsor does not prevent the immigrant from establishing eligibility for the relevant benefit and prevents the children of fiancés of U.S. citizens from aging out of the visa application and green card processes. It also provides equal treatment for stepchildren to qualify as “immediate relatives” as long as they were under age 21 at the time of their parent’s marriage.

Each day, millions of immigrants granted a visa based on family ties make valuable contributions to our country and economy. Keeping families together and allowing eligible immigrants to join their American relatives on U.S. soil should be a priority.

U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021: Responsible and Effective Border Management

The U.S. Citizenship Act resets U.S. border policy to focus on smart solutions.

U.S. Border Policy is Severely Broken

- The prior administration was focused solely on the wall and did nothing to address the root causes of why people are coming to our Southern Border, causing a humanitarian crisis at the border. To this day, people continue to migrate to the United States because of this failure.
- There are significant challenges in Central America that are forcing people to flee. The widespread destruction caused by two recent hurricanes, along with ongoing violence and instability, are forcing people to flee the region and undertake a dangerous journey to the United States.
- The lack of legal migration channels for people escaping persecution in the Western Hemisphere has led to people making the dangerous journey north.
- The majority of drugs enter the United States through – not between – ports of entry. Approximately 90% of heroin, 83% of fentanyl, and 73% cocaine that CBP seized in FY20 was seized at ports of entry.

The US Citizenship Act Builds Upon Existing DHS Resources

- DHS has been allocated record-level resources for immigration enforcement – funds that will be augmented to provide smarter and safer border management.
 - DHS received \$26 billion for immigration enforcement in FY20 – 33% more than all federal criminal law enforcement agencies combined.
 - From 2016 to 2020 alone, ICE and CBP budgets increased by \$6 billion.
 - The number of CBP and ICE officers doubled over the last decade.
- These resources will remain in place and the bill directs new resources where most effective –at ports of entry where technology, infrastructure and screening capacity is desperately needed. It will also effectively extend our border by shifting asylum processing to the region, so that people have other options than to make the dangerous journey to our Southern Border, and to address the root causes of migration.

The Border Must be Safe, But It Also Must Work for our Economy

- An analysis of 2019 FBI Crime statistics found that border cities have among the lowest violent crime and property crime rates per capita in the country. At the same time, the border region is an economic engine that helps support our national economy. The San Ysidro port of entry in California, for instance, is one of the busiest ports in the world and sees millions of people and goods cross every year.
- Mexico and Canada are our first and second trading partners in the world, respectively, together accounting for nearly one-third of U.S. exports. In 2019, over \$400 billion

dollars' worth of goods were traded across the southern border and approximately 5 million jobs in the U.S. are dependent on trade with Mexico.

- In FY19, CBP processed more than 681,000 people per day through land ports of entry.
- Yet infrastructure at the ports of entry require repair and modernization. Government facilities at land border crossings are outdated – with some more than 70 years old, and agencies need access to better technology to more effectively and efficiently manage the border and promote trade and travel.

The US Citizenship Act provides a framework for a multi-pronged approach to manage the border:

- The bill **addresses the root causes of migration** from Central America by funding the President's 4-year plan to increase assistance to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras conditioned on their ability to reduce the corruption, violence, poverty, and famine that now causes people to flee.
- It **cracks down on bad actors** by enhancing the ability to prosecute individuals involved in smuggling, narcotics and trafficking networks who are responsible for drugs flowing into our country and the exploitation of migrants. It also expands transnational anti-gang task forces in Central America.
- It creates **safe and legal channels** for people to seek protection, so they can apply for legal status in Central America instead of making the dangerous journey north.
- It **modernizes and manages the border** effectively with technology that enhances our ability to detect contraband and counter transnational criminal networks since illicit drugs are most likely to be smuggled through legal ports of entry. It also effectively **extends our border by shifting refugee processing to the region**, so that people have other options than to make the dangerous journey to our Southern Border, facilitating burden sharing with other countries in the region.

It **protects border communities** by providing for additional rescue beacons to prevent needless deaths along the border, requiring agent training and oversight to investigate criminal and administrative misconduct, and requiring department-wide policies governing the use of force.

Historically, immigration has been a bipartisan issue — and has enjoyed support from a broad set of stakeholders. This legislation is a common-sense approach that focuses on what works. We owe it to the American public to fix the system once and for all.