

There is already a workable solution to immigration: Pay to stay

BY SEAN O'NEILL, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 01/15/18 08:00 AM EST

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Successful immigration reform can happen if responsibility is placed where it should be: on the shoulders of the immigrants themselves and those who employ them. The 20-30 million American homeowners, factory and service owners, farmers and others who employ unauthorized immigrants benefit from the cheaper labor, yet American taxpayers unfairly bear the cost. The 10-year work permit for unauthorized immigrants makes sense, because many of them have badly needed journeyman skills in infrastructure construction, farming and food processing.

It's time for sensible people to be heard on immigration policy, and for our government to make respect, equality, accountability, and legality available to all. U.S. taxpayers need protection from all the empty tough talk and from the unfair burdens this nation's currently broken immigration system places on our daily lives. It's time the U.S. enables unauthorized immigrants and their employers to provide a vital revenue stream and be part of the solution. No drama, no live broadcasts, just a solution.



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It's beyond time to end the tough talk, the dramatics and the uncertainty. Instead, let's focus on funding.

With immigration, it takes funding to enforce our laws and achieve border security. Homeland Security needs an additional \$3 billion to implement biometric identification, like fingerprinting and eye scans. Federal, state and local agencies don't have sufficient funds to fully protect workers and provide essential services like healthcare, education and many others.

There is a simple plan put forward by the Immigrant Tax Inquiry Group (ITIG) that would generate \$210 billion in new revenue over a 10-year period. This revenue could help address many areas of need in this country. Better yet, it's completely funded by unauthorized immigrants and their employers.

We propose a renewable 10-year Special Work Permit called a REALcard (REAL for Respect, Equality, Accountability and Legality) that immigrants can earn when they contribute a nickel for every dollar they receive. This contribution would be matched by their employers, so we call this a "five + five solution." Using this flat tax minimizes bureaucracy and generates billions in new revenue while providing legality and benefits for workers, employers, and U.S. taxpayers.

This approach is neither mass citizenship, nor mass deportation, but rather a third way forward. By embracing this proposal, both the White House and Congress could cool the heated immigration rhetoric and help detoxify the debate, while bringing humanitarian relief to millions of unauthorized immigrants who fear a knock on the door from ICE. Let's make certain people can "pursue happiness" by passing a "bill of love" that is fair to all.

Sean O'Neill is a spokesperson for the Immigrant Tax Inquiry Group (ITIG). ITIG was formed in 2010 to develop an immigration reform proposal that provides respect, equality, accountability and legality for workers, employers, taxpayers, and the essential services we all rely upon.