



## CONGRESS BLOG

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### Conservatives: Make immigration reform a priority and a reality

By Jimmy Kemp and Ali Noorani



Getty Images

While the political atmosphere surrounding immigration policy is charged, there is right of center political support for immigrants and immigration reform.

Surprised? Don't be, rhetoric as we know, can overwhelm substance at times like these.

In the midst of a presidential campaign like no other — less than 12 hours after the first presidential debate, in fact — conservative speakers representing business, academia, politics, faith, and national security gathered in Miami recently to talk about the need for immigration reform that prioritizes national security, is consistent with rule of law, emphasizes accountability and benefits all Americans.

At the Kemp Forum on the Future of Immigrants and America, people from a broad range of fields spoke about the importance of immigrant communities, economically and otherwise.

That bodes well for a constructive conversation after the dust settles, regardless of the result of the presidential election. No matter how close the election is, Republicans and Democrats in Congress will

need to work together with the new administration to make immigration reform a priority and a reality, not just a pipe dream.

According to a recent CNN/ORC International poll, Congress would have the support of 82 percent of conservatives in enacting legislation that would allow undocumented immigrants to earn legalized status and eventual citizenship.

Quite simply, we can't afford to perpetuate a system that puts us at a competitive disadvantage. American workers will benefit from a new immigration process that allows everyone to contribute to our nation and help us reach our full potential in the global economy.

Here are some of the key ingredients for immigration reform to move forward in 2017:

### 1) An emphasis on our security

The United States has increased security at the border, and more Mexicans are leaving the U.S. than coming here. Our refugee vetting process is extremely thorough. But any immigration reform will have to keep our safety and security front and center.

"Illegal migration to the United States is down dramatically, and border enforcement is a big reason why," Council on Foreign Relations Senior Fellow Edward Alden said at the Miami event. "It's time to move past the rhetoric and start a serious conversation about how much is enough."

### 2) Help for businesses and the economy

Our visa system has been outdated for far too long. A new process can promote economy-centered legal immigration that encourages job creation and helps American workers and keeps products and produce "Made in America."

"In agriculture, we are on the front lines of immigration reform, witnessing daily the need to get the system right for the long-term competitiveness of our farmers and the economic prosperity of our workers," Ken Barbic, Senior Director of Federal Government Affairs at Western Growers, said at the Kemp Forum. "We work to achieve an immigration system that enhances our ability to compete in a global marketplace while continuing to provide food and jobs for our country."

Such an approach also will go a long way toward securing our borders by greatly reducing employers' and workers' incentive to sidestep the legal immigration process. Providing for legal entry, when the economy requires it, also discourages illegal entry.

### 3) A focus on our shared values

We need a compassionate response to immigrants in our communities. After all, immigrants are real people and families.

We cannot accept the human cost, the cost to families and communities, of mass deportation. To picture an America executing a mass deportation strategy is to picture a country fully betraying its values.

On the contrary, we need an immigration process that honors human dignity, preserves and promotes family unity, and respects people trying to provide for their families and contribute to their communities.

Faith leaders continue to provide a moral compass.

“Every human being — just because he or she is a human being — has a right to live in conditions worthy of human life,” Archbishop Thomas Wenski of the Archdiocese of Miami said at the forum.

“When people do not find conditions necessary for human flourishing where they are — because of lack of economic resources, political oppression or religious or social persecution — they will seek or will be forced to seek such conditions worthy of human life elsewhere.”

#### 4) Action from Congress

Only Congress has the power to provide long-term solutions that have the force of law.

That’s why any administration must support congressional action to pass laws that permanently strengthen the rule of law, ensure our security, boost our economy and respect human dignity.

The consensus in Miami was clear. In the words of Rudy Fernandez of the University of Miami, “Modernizing our immigration laws will remain a pressing national priority regardless of who wins the presidential election or who controls Congress in 2017.”

For Congress, passing reform will not be easy, but the need is clear. Also clear: There is right of center, conservative support for a new immigration process that helps all Americans thrive.

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