

AMERICA'S IMMIGRATION POLICY: STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S  
BORDERS AND OPERATION GATEKEEPER  
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I have come to talk to you about an important issue that is on the minds of many Californians today. That issue is immigration. Illegal immigration is a very serious problem, and no region of this country has been harder hit by the influx of illegal immigrants than California.

We are a generous nation and welcome legal immigrants from around the world. But many Americans, and in particular those in California, are now worried that illegal immigrants may threaten our peace and prosperity. Immigration policy -- long left to a small circle of policy-makers in Washington -- is now the subject du jour in city council meetings, partisan political debates, and radio talk shows. However, demagoguery and hyperbole have often replaced rational discussion. It is time to refocus the debate in California and in the nation and talk about an immigration policy that makes sense.

Today, on Citizenship Day, I have come to talk to you about the Clinton Administration's immigration policy - a policy that is firmly rooted in this nation's historic traditions but based on the realities of today. I want to tell you about the Clinton Administration's immigration priorities to shut the door on illegal immigration and keep the door open to legal immigration; I want to tell you about the early results of our efforts to intensify our presence on the border, the new initiatives we are launching in California and our broader strategy to reduce incentives for illegal immigration.

We are pushing harder and working faster to address this problem than any administration in history. California and its industries profited from an open-door policy to immigration for decades. The problem of illegal immigration in this state was created over the course of the last thirty years and it simply will not be solved in one.

But I will tell you this: In the last 18 months,

this administration has laid out a long-term and short-term strategy for cracking down on illegal immigration at our borders. Our strategy is designed to work now and to have staying power over the course of years. It is not a quick fix that will provide photo opportunities for November and backfire in December. I can't describe it in a 30-second soundbite, but what I will describe is an aggressive and sensible approach to cracking down on illegal immigration.

I was in San Diego a year ago. I saw thousands of people amassed on the South side of the border waiting unabashedly to cross illegally into the United States; a Border Patrol that was so thin that the agents already knew as they started their shifts that they faced a losing battle; and equipment that was so outdated that one would have thought we had traveled back to the 1950's. The border and our Immigration and Naturalization Service was suffering from decades of neglect. Few elected officials perceived this as a major problem. Together with President Clinton, and

the Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Doris Meissner, we immediately determined to take action. When I got back from California we launched a serious multi-year plan to strengthen enforcement on the border.

In the past, our limited border enforcement and the lure of jobs in the U.S. sent a mixed message to those who considered coming to this country illegally. Now, our message is clear: it is wrong to come to this country illegally. It is wrong to tear and climb through a hole in our border fence, to hide in a truck and try to sneak across the border, to use a fake passport or visa to gain entry, or to run across the border and try to evade the Border Patrol.

Last year, agents who should have been on the line were sitting behind desks. Today, support personnel and automation has freed up agents to catch illegal immigrants and smugglers.

Last year, agents filled out forms by hand. Today, we have an automated case processing system-

called ENFORCE.

Last year, agents were sidelined due to broken-down vehicles. Today, our agents are equipped with 174 new all-terrain vehicles.

Last year, agents could not communicate with each other or with law enforcement about the location of illegal aliens. Today, they are outfitted with advanced radio equipment.

Last year, the border was dark, making it easy for aliens and smugglers to hide. Today, miles of lighting have increased agents' effectiveness.

Last year, criminals assaulted and robbed innocent people regularly on the border. Today, border violence is down over 50 percent and we have taken back the night from the smugglers and criminals.

Last year, our own Border Patrol agents and the people of California wondered whether we would provide

the resources for an effective border control strategy. Today, we have a strategy in place that has begun to produce results. The number of apprehensions along the San Diego border has gone down 20 percent compared to August last year.

This was just a start. When the President signed the Crime Bill last week he delivered to the INS the tools it has needed for decades to do the job we have been expecting it do. He delivered monies to buy new equipment. He delivered funding to hire new agents. And he delivered tough new immigration and criminal laws.

It is with this groundwork laid, with these new resources at our disposal, that I am pleased to announce that we are now ready to launch a new initiative: Operation Gatekeeper. Gatekeeper is the strategic piece we need to plug the holes at the border and make the border impenetrable to illegal crossing.

Operation Gatekeeper is designed to be as fully effective in California as our highly successful "Hold the Line" operation has been in El Paso. And we expect to achieve the same results: a secure border that stops illegal entry. It is a plan that is specifically tailored to California.

Unlike El Paso, San Diego poses challenges beyond just deploying more agents on the line. The illegal traffic in El Paso is largely made up of daytime commuters and casual crossers; the terrain is flat and bound by a river -- which is why our strategy of simply bringing agents forward to the line has been so effective.

By contrast, in San Diego we must battle smugglers and long distance travelers at night who are crossing canyons and mountains. Here we must strategically use fencing, lighting and agents to channel aliens to key crossing areas that we will now close. In Operation Gatekeeper, we will deploy new agents in tiers to stop illegal traffic through these corridors. This plan

will achieve the goal we have for the entire Southwest border -- demonstrated so effectively in El Paso: prevention through deterrence.

Here's how Operation Gatekeeper will work:

First, we are going to move the necessary personnel into place to effectively block the crossing areas by hiring and redeploying agents.

In the next 100 days, we will add 220 newly trained and redeployed Border Patrol agents to the line in San Diego. With these new forces and the new agents added to the line since we started our efforts, the San Diego border will be fortified with nearly 400 more agents than it had just a year ago.

And even more are on the way. The Crime Bill and the October 1 Fiscal Year budget will pay for 700 more Border Patrol agents in the next fiscal year. We will place these new agents in the areas of greatest need all along the Southwest border -- California, as well

as Arizona and Texas -- which many smugglers and border crossers have come to view as side doors into the State of California.

Within one year, we will have augmented the number of agents on the line in San Diego by over 60 percent.

We will further increase our agent force on the line by testing the use of agents who are currently assigned to the San Clemente or Temecula checkpoints.

Second, we will complete the lighting on every single sector of the border that needs to be lit. This will cover 1.5 miles to what is known as the "soccer field". Illumination along key areas of the border will further deter crossers, help our new agents detect more aliens trying to cross illicitly, and continue to reduce border violence.

Third, the days when the border can serve as a revolving door for illegal immigrants are over. Beginning October 1, in San Diego, we will fingerprint

every illegal alien we apprehend. This new fingerprinting policy will help us crack down on criminal aliens, track those who repeatedly break our immigration and criminal laws, and help us measure the effectiveness of Operation Gatekeeper. In December, we will activate new technology to implement fingerprint data with our computerized tracking system.

Fourth, we will crack down on alien smugglers who make a profit in the trafficking of human misery. In the next 50 days, we will be using new authorities under the Crime Bill to prosecute alien smugglers in Southern California. Anyone who tries to smuggle an alien into the United States for commercial gain can now be sent to prison for up to 10 years. If anyone dies in the smuggling attempt, we now have the authority to seek the death penalty against the alien smuggler.

Fifth, we are moving forward with a plan to implement a dedicated commuter lane at the Otay Mesa

Port-of-Entry similar to what is already in place in the Pacific Northwest. This new commuter lane will expedite the smooth flow of legitimate, legal traffic across the San Diego border, and under NAFTA this flow becomes even more critical for the state. This Administration, together with the state's congressional delegation, successfully pushed for congressional authority to open a commuter lane.

Finally, the Federal Government will begin, for the first time ever, to help pay the costs of incarcerating criminal aliens who have committed crimes in California. Congress appropriated \$130 million in FY 1995 and the Crime Bill authorizes \$1.8 billion over six years to underwrite the cost of criminal alien incarceration. By December 31, we will send California the first down payment on its share of this money. According to a recent study, California incurs over 70 percent of the total costs expended by numerous states to incarcerate criminal aliens. The State will receive a sizeable portion of the \$130 million available in the coming fiscal year, and we

expect California to receive even greater funds in coming years.

We will further reduce the costs associated with criminal aliens with an expanded program to deport criminal aliens from California's prisons. Over the course of the next year, we will expedite the deportation of 6,000 criminal aliens -- almost double the 3,600 aliens removed from the State a year ago.

This funding will augment unprecedented levels of federal aid that California will be receiving to defray the costs associated with immigration. President Clinton requested an increase in his FY 1995 budget of over \$2.5 billion in the resources going to reimburse California for educational, health, and other programs servicing immigrants -- compared with that requested by President Bush in his FY 1993 budget request.

Let me assure those of you here today, the residents of California, and the entire nation, that

we are committed to the success of the Operation Gatekeeper I have just detailed, and to the success of our strategies along the entire Southwest border. We are securing our nation's borders, we are aggressively enforcing our immigration laws, and we are doing it now. We will not rest until the flow of illegal immigrants across our Southwest border has stopped.

I will return to California next year to observe first-hand the successes that will result from the newly invigorated and professionally equipped Border Patrol, the deployment of our fingerprinting program, updated equipment and new technologies, and the vigorous enforcement of our criminal and immigration laws to crack down on smugglers and criminal aliens.

I plan to follow the progress of our strategies along the entire Southwest border very carefully. To assure their success, I have asked Commissioner Meissner to visit the border monthly during this key period of implementation. We will also convene a series of community forums with local, state, and

federal officials, representatives of law enforcement, and community leaders from across the Southwest border region to discuss the progress of our border enforcement operations.

In addition, we are seriously considering implementing a land border crossing fee similar to fees already collected at all airports. Later this month, the Commission on Immigration Reform, headed by former Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, plans to recommend the initiation of such a fee, with all funds to be used at the border: for additional enforcement tools and to facilitate and promote legal crossing.

Border enforcement is, however, only one dimension of our immigration policy. We must also reduce the incentives for illegal immigration. We are working to aggressively enforce our employer sanctions laws. It is incumbent on state and local governments to do their share to reduce incentives that draw illegal aliens to our land -- most particularly by enforcing labor standards and working with the private sector to

eliminate job opportunities for undocumented workers.

We recognize that the root causes of illegal immigration are international in scope and require foreign policy answers. Therefore, we are working to restore democracy in countries that abuse human rights. We are also striving to improve economic conditions in neighboring states. For example, we are working closely with the Government of Mexico to implement the North-American Free Trade Agreement and to otherwise address the problem of illegal immigration.

We will be unwavering in our commitment to fighting illegal immigration. At the same time we will stand firm in support of legal immigration. Ours is a land of immigrants. As George Washington said in 1783: the "bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectful stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions, whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges. . ."

Whether your ancestors came from Sicily or Saigon, Vilma or Vienna, the Yucutan or Uruguay, or Dakar or Denmark, as mine did, they most likely struggled for many years before becoming settled in this country. It is easy today to look back, at browning photographs of grandparents and great grandparents, or in the museum at Ellis Island, and romanticize about the early immigrant experience. But every group of immigrants -- the Irish in the 1840s, the Russians and Poles in the 1890s, the Chinese and Japanese in the 1920s -- were met with anxiety, and even hostility, from those who were already here. Yet, throughout every generation in our nation's history, immigrants arriving from all parts of the world continue to contribute to the greatness of this land.

This year, we worked hard to secure funding in Congress to educate the immigrant community about how to become naturalized citizens and the benefits of citizenship. On the occasion of Citizenship Day, we are honored to have with us four individuals who have ended their long journey to this country this week by

becoming American citizens. I would like to acknowledge the following new American citizens:

Sylvie Catherine Vizard, a native of France who settled in California in 1983. Ms. Vizard has two children and is a psychologist. She counsels families at the Early Childhood Center;

Hilarion Torres Lambaren, a native of Mexico who immigrated to California at the age of 20 to seek opportunity and build a life in America. After 15 years of hard work, he and his brother have built a successful engineering business;

Chukwuma Paul Mbagwu, a native of Nigeria who came to the United States as a student and is now an accountant for St. Mary's Medical Group; and

Chief Petty Officer Pete Ganguangco, a native of the Philippines, who has served in the United States Navy for the past 14 years. Now as a United States Citizen, Chief Ganguangco will be

eligible to earn a commission as a Naval Officer.

We welcome you as citizens and are grateful for the contributions you have made and will continue to make in your communities, professions and families. America promises you the opportunity, justice, and freedom upon which this nation was founded.

In closing, let us reaffirm today that our immigration policy is not about hate or fear of those from other countries. It is not about the color of anyone's skin, cultural traditions, native tongue, or accumulated wealth. It is about protecting law and order; protecting those who are living here legally, working hard and playing by the rules. It is about the American dream and making it a reality for as many people as possible. Please join us in our effort to fight illegal immigration and with equal zeal to fight the bigotry and prejudice that fear of immigrants can breed.

Thank you.