

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 26, 2013

Dear Friends,

Over the last few days, I have received numerous emails and calls from conservatives and Tea Party activists from across the country regarding immigration. Their opinions really matter to me because they were with me three years ago when so many people here in Washington – and in Florida – thought I had no chance to win my election.

These people are patriots. They are everyday Americans from all walks of life who are deeply concerned about the direction our country is headed. And they are increasingly unhappy about the immigration reform proposal in the Senate.

It's not because they are "anti-immigrant" as some on the left like to say. It's not because they are close-minded. They believe, as I do, that as a sovereign country we have a right to secure our borders. That we have a right to have immigration laws and to enforce them. And they are increasingly opposed to this effort because, for over three decades and despite many promises to enforce the law, the federal government under both Republicans and Democrats has failed to do so.

In the end, it's not just immigration reform itself that worries them, it's the government that has failed them so many times before. They realize we have a legal immigration system that needs to be reformed. They realize we have over 11 million people currently living in the country illegally, and we have to deal with them. Yet they simply believe that no matter what law we pass, we cannot trust the federal government to ever actually enforce it.

This sentiment was best summed up for me in an email I received from Sharon Calvert, a prominent Tea Party leader in Tampa, Florida who wrote:

"Today, June 2013, we are in a very different political climate than we were even after the last election. We are in a political climate of distrust. Distrust of government and elected representatives is at its highest."

She goes on to say, "Do we want to trust this administration to faithfully enforce a bill to the best interests of all Americans with a bill that few have read?"

She makes a powerful point.

After finding out that the IRS investigates people based on their political views, all the questions that remain about Benghazi, and seeing the Justice Department target reporters, trust in the federal government is rightfully at an all time low.

I share this skepticism about this administration and Washington in general. In just the two years I have been here, I have seen the games that are played and the promises that are broken, and how the American people suffer as a consequence. And this is exactly what led me to get involved in this issue in the first place.

We have a badly broken legal immigration system. Not only does it not work, it actually encourages illegal immigration.

We have a border with Mexico that, despite billions of dollars already spent, is still not secure. Every day, people, drugs and guns are trafficked across that border.

And we have 11 million people living in this country illegally in de facto amnesty.

This is the way things are now. This is the status quo. And it is a terrible mess. It is hurting our country terribly. And unless we do something about it, this administration is never going to fix it.

Political pundits love to focus on the politics of all this. But for me, this isn't about catering to any group for political gain. Predictably, despite my work on immigration reform, so-called "pro-immigrant" groups protest me daily.

This isn't about winning points from the establishment or the mainstream media either. No matter how consistent I have been in focusing on the border security aspects of reform, whenever I have spoken about the need to improve this part of the legislation, the beltway media has accused me of trying to undermine or walk away from the reform.

This isn't about becoming a Washington dealmaker. Truthfully, it would have been far easier to just sit back, vote against any proposal and give speeches about how I would have done things differently.

And finally, this most certainly isn't about gaining support for future office. Many conservative commentators and leaders who I deeply respect, and who I agree with on practically every other issue, are disappointed about my involvement in this debate.

I got involved in this issue for one simple reason: I ran for office to try and fix things that are hurting this special country of ours. And in the end, that is what this is about for me – trying to fix a serious problem that faces America.

The proposal before the Senate is by no means perfect. Like any proposal that comes before the Democrat-controlled Senate, it has flaws.

But it also has important reforms conservatives have been trying to get for years. It changes our legal immigration system from a predominantly family-based system of chain migration to a more merit-based system focused on job skills.

The proposal mandates the most ambitious border and interior security measures in our nation's history. It requires and funds the completion of 700 miles of real border fence, adds 20,000 new border agents, details a specific technology plan for each sector of the border, requires E-Verify for every employer in America, and creates a tracking system to identify people who overstay their visas.

These are all things that, at a minimum, must happen before those in the country illegally can apply for permanent legal status.

And the proposal deals with those who are illegally here now in a reasonable but responsible way. Right now, those here illegally are living in de facto amnesty. They are unregistered, many pay no taxes, and few will ever pay any price for having violated our laws. Under this bill they will have to come forward, pass background checks, pay a fine, start paying taxes, and be ineligible for welfare, food stamps or ObamaCare.

In return, the only thing they get is a temporary work permit. And they can't renew it in six years unless they can prove that they have been holding a job and paying taxes. For at least ten years, that is all they can have.

And after all that, they cannot even apply for permanent status until the fence is built, the border patrol agents are hired, and the border security technology, E-Verify and the tracking system are fully in place.

Despite all these measures, however, opposition from many conservatives has grown significantly in the last few weeks.

Why? Because they have heard that "the Secretary of Homeland Security can just ignore the border requirement." But this is not true. The department does have discretion on where to build the fence, but not on the amount of fencing it must build. At the end of the day, 700 miles of pedestrian fencing must be built.

They've also heard that "the Secretary of Homeland Security can just waive the radars, drones, ground sensors and other technology required in the bill." But that is not true. The Secretary can always add more to the plan, but the list of border security measures we mandate in the legislation is the minimum that must be implemented.

Some oppose it because they have heard that "a future Congress can just defund all the security measures." But that is not true. The money is built into the bill. Unlike previous border security laws, it doesn't leave it dependent on future funding.

They oppose the bill because they have heard that it creates a taxpayer subsidy for people "to buy a car or a scooter." That is not true. Nothing in this bill allows that.

And they oppose the bill because they have heard that last Friday “a brand new 1,100 page bill that no one had read is now what is before the Senate.” That is not true. This is the exact same bill that has been publicly available for ten weeks. The main additions to it are about 120 pages of border security requirements.

Because in order to add 700 miles of fence, 20,000 border agents and a prohibition on foreign students or tourists from getting ObamaCare, we had to add pages to the bill.

I understand why after reading these false claims, people would be opposed to the bill. I understand why, after we have been burned by large bills in the past, people are suspicious of big reforms of any kind.

And I understand why, after promises made in the past on immigration have not been kept, people doubt whether they will ever be kept in the future.

But I also understand what is going to happen if at some point we do not come to an agreement we can support on immigration reform. We will still have a broken legal immigration system. We won't have more border patrol officers. We will still not have enough fencing. We will still not have mandatory E-Verify. And we will still have 11 million people here illegally.

And that is why I am involved in this. Because despite all the problems we have with our government, the only way to mandate a fence, E-Verify and more agents, is to pass a law that does so.

I knew getting these requirements into the bill would not be easy. This administration and their allies insist the border is already secure and have fought every effort to improve border security. This administration and their allies want the fastest and easiest path to citizenship possible, and have fought every condition and trigger in the bill.

I got involved because I knew that if conservatives didn't get involved in shaping this proposal, it would not have any of the border security reforms our nation desperately needs.

Getting to this point has been very difficult. To hear the worry, anxiety and growing anger in the voices of so many people who helped me get elected to the Senate, who I agree with on virtually every other issue, has been a real trial for me. I know they love America, and they are deeply worried about the direction this administration and the political left are trying to take our country.

But when I was a candidate, I told you I wanted to come here and fight. Fight to protect what is good for America. And fight to stop what is bad for America.

I believe what we have now is hurting our country badly, and I wasn't going to leave it to the Democrats alone to figure out how to fix it.

Perhaps at the heart of my support of this proposal is that I know firsthand that while immigrants have always impacted America, America changes immigrants even more. Just a generation ago, my parents lived in poverty in another country. But America changed them. It gave them a chance to improve their lives. It gave them the opportunity to open doors for me and my siblings that had been closed for them. And the longer they lived here, the older their kids got, the more conservative they became. The more convinced they became that limited government, free enterprise and our constitutional liberties made this nation special.

I am a witness to the transformative power of our country. How it doesn't change people's pocketbooks, it changes their hearts and minds.

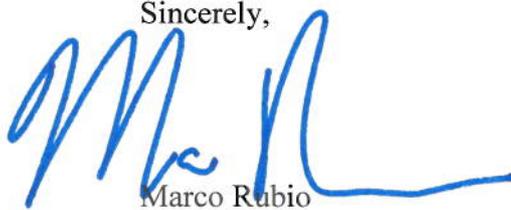
And despite all of our challenges and despite our broken government, I believe this is still that kind of country.

I realize that in the end, many of my fellow conservatives will still not be able to support this reform. But I hope you will understand that I honestly believe it is the right thing for our country. To finally have an immigration system that works, to finally have a fence, more agents and E-Verify, and to finally put an end to de facto amnesty.

In my heart and in my mind, I know that we must solve this problem once and for all, or it will only get worse. It will only get harder to solve.

To my fellow conservatives, I will continue to fight alongside you for real tax reform, lowering the debt, balancing our budget, reducing regulations, rolling back job-killing environmental policies and repealing the disaster of ObamaCare. I will continue to fight for the sanctity of life and traditional marriage.

And I will continue to work in the hopes of one day uniting behind a common conservative strategy on how to fix our broken immigration system once and for all.

Sincerely,  
  
Marco Rubio