

# STAND FOR AMERICA

## Immigration

*For decades, politicians have failed to enforce our immigration laws, ignoring the clear wishes and interests of the American people. As a result, our country is straining under the stress of large levels of immigration and muddling through with a system that is unfair to immigrants and Americans alike. We need sensible reforms that make our system work for everyone and reflect the values of our great and welcoming country.*

### The American Dream

America has long welcomed immigrants who play by the rules. The remarkable thing about the American Dream is that it can become a reality for anyone who shares our values and seeks a better life, no matter where they come from. Immigrants from across the globe have left their homes and crossed oceans in order to live and breathe free. Over two centuries, the hard work, dedication, and sacrifice of immigrants have made our country wealthier, stronger, and safer.

But for decades, our politicians—Democrats and Republicans alike—have let the immigration system steadily break. They have failed to enforce our laws and have made a mockery of what the American Dream has to offer. This has hurt everyone, from American communities that are forced to pay for the health care and education of those who entered the country illegally, to immigrants themselves, who often live and work in the shadows, treated as second-class citizens by the very people who turned a blind eye at the border and allowed them to break our laws.

### A Broken System

The numbers show just how much our country has been affected by the immigration system's failures. While the number of legal immigrants coming into the United States has stayed relatively [steady](#) since 1990, illegal immigration has [spiraled](#) out of control. Today, the best guess is that at least 11 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States, with one prominent study [pegging](#) the number at over 22 million. That [would](#) make the illegal immigration population of the United States the 59<sup>th</sup> biggest country in the world all on its own—larger than the countries of Belgium, Greece, and Sweden.

The surge in illegal immigration is despite the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which granted amnesty to millions of people. This attempt at a solution, like so many of Washington's best-laid plans, only made things worse. It gave legal status to undocumented immigrants, sending a message to law-abiding applicants waiting patiently in line that it pays to break the law. Less than three years later, the *New York Times* [reported](#) that the Act "may have actually encouraged unlawful entry in several ways." The result? From 1998 to 2018, 95 percent of the [increase](#) in federal arrests was due to immigration offenses.

The failed system has forced rapid and major changes on the country that people did not vote for, further polarizing our politics and driving us apart.

This shows up first in our hospitals and schools, which are already [treating](#) and [teaching](#) tens of millions of patients and students every year. In times of tight budgets, Americans subsidize billions of dollars worth of health care for undocumented immigrants every year and spend billions more to educate students whose families are not authorized to be in the United States.

The need for solutions has never been greater. The first priority in fixing our broken system must be securing the border. In 2018, the number of federal arrests for immigration violations eclipsed 100,000 for the first time, with nearly all of them [occurring](#) along the U.S.-Mexican border. And yet, in the face of these statistics, Democrats have advocated *more* open borders. This is playing pretend with our nation's security: legalizing crime may erase the crime rate, but it doesn't make Americans safer. Only a secure border will do that.

## Democratic Party Extremism

The majority of candidates for the Democratic nomination for president in 2020 [embraced](#) universal health care for undocumented immigrants. Every one [supported](#) citizenship for undocumented immigrants. And none had or has a serious plan for securing our border.

It's hard to overstate how much the Democrats have abandoned our nation's values when it comes to the border. Just consider a simple [thought](#) experiment, and try to identify which elected official said the following words.

First, "All Americans ... are rightly disturbed by the large numbers of illegal aliens entering our country. The jobs they hold might otherwise be held by citizens or legal immigrants. The public services they use impose burdens on our taxpayers ..."

That's not President Trump. Those words were [spoken](#) by President Clinton, in 1995.

Second, "Our direct message to the families of Central America: do not send your children to the borders." Or, "Undocumented workers broke our immigration laws, and I believe that they must be held accountable ..."

That's not President Trump either. President Obama [said that](#), just six short years ago.

Nobody would call Bill Clinton or Barack Obama conservative, but today's Democrats are moving further left than ever before. Just consider what the Democratic candidates for president said this year.

Bernie Sanders isn't content with merely easing enforcement of the law. He [said](#) it's time to "break up" a key agency, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, altogether. Democratic vice-presidential candidate, Kamala Harris, isn't far behind. She [called](#) for "a complete overhaul of the agency, mission, culture, operations."

Democrats used to respect the rule of law, prioritize a secure border, and value their obligations to American citizens over their commitments to undocumented immigrants. Now, they want to open our

borders and admit people in unlimited numbers. In fact, under the current liberal definition of “asylum,” America would have a moral obligation to provide asylum, citizenship, and health insurance to almost anyone who manages to cross our border. Why even have a border at that point?

## Asylum in America

The word “asylum” has been thrown around a lot in recent debates about immigration. You’ll hear the left claim that America is turning away asylum seekers who want nothing but a better life for themselves. And while it may be true that the migrants at our southern border are seeking a better standard of living than they have at home, whether all of them qualify for asylum as our laws define it is a different question altogether.

To qualify for asylum under American law, it’s not enough for applicants to be poor. They can’t just be fleeing violence either—even dangers as real as gang violence. And they can’t only be trying to improve their lives. If that were all it took to be granted asylum in the United States, then billions of people around the world would have a claim to U.S. entry.

Our country suffers when politicians promise asylum to more people than our system can feasibly accommodate. In 2008, our immigration courts [received](#) just over 13,000 applications for asylum from those facing deportation; by 2019, that number had [skyrocketed](#) to nearly 150,000. This has contributed to the growing [backlog](#) of applicants weighing down our immigration courts: 2008 saw fewer than 190,000 pending cases in immigration court, but by 2019, there were well over a million.

This broken process only encouraged more illegal migration. It [takes](#) two to five years for people who enter the country claiming asylum to get a court date. While they’re in legal limbo, some have been given work permits, and allowed to become quasi-citizens, while others have been allowed to fade into the margins of society, living in hiding. Desperate people from other countries have had every incentive to take advantage of our incompetent system.

To be given asylum here, American law [has](#) clear expectations for what is required. An applicant must show they are fleeing persecution on at least one of five protected grounds: race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or particular social group. This is the law of the land, but the left is either choosing to forget it or ignoring it altogether. In doing so, they’re diminishing what asylum was created for in the first place: to give a helping hand to the people in the world who *truly* need it the most.

What does this mean for our immigration system?

It means that if you are a Syrian Christian fleeing persecution and war in your homeland, you may be granted asylum, because if you aren’t, then you are at serious risk of being beheaded by ISIS terrorists. In 2017, the Trump administration did just that, when it [resettled](#) over 6,500 Syrian refugees inside the United States.

It means that if you are a member of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority group in Burma who have endured years of violence simply because of their faith, you may be [granted](#) asylum here in the United States. The Trump administration did that, too—in 2018, it accepted over 3,500 refugees from Burma, and gave them a chance for a better life here.

It means that if you come from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where some of the worst atrocities of the last 25 years were committed, and you apply for asylum to the United States, you have a chance of receiving it. That's why, for the last three years, the Trump administration has [admitted](#) more refugees from Congo than from any other country—an average of over 7,600 per year.

These statistics paint a picture of America at its best—that being compassionate and following the law are not mutually exclusive. By ignoring this fact, liberals fail to grasp a basic point: America will prove most compassionate and generous when its citizens have confidence that our immigration laws are being followed and enforced.

This illustrates what our asylum system *is* meant to do and what it is *not* meant to do. Is it meant to welcome people of other faiths, like Christians in the Middle East and Muslims from Burma, who are subject to violence because of their beliefs? Absolutely. Is it designed for people fleeing war, atrocity, and political persecution? Yes, and it should be.

But it is emphatically *not* for everyone. Nor is it for people who are poor or fear crime. Many Americans also struggle with poverty and live in high-crime areas. Our first obligation must always be to them. We cannot provide asylum for everyone who seeks it, and our asylum system was never designed to do that. With the reality of limited resources and an ever-growing national debt, we must prioritize our fellow Americans. It is also a matter of preserving our national cohesion—our very identity as a country, bonded together in solidarity and citizenship, under the rule of law.

## Deterring Illegal Immigration

The left constantly tries to claim the moral high ground on immigration. They paint anyone who disagrees with them as bigots for simply wanting to uphold the law. But the Democratic Party's inaction on immigration has been far worse for immigrants than the common-sense proposals most Americans support.

Just look at the [issues](#) one-by-one.

It is logical to support mandatory E-Verify, a system that allows businesses to determine the eligibility of their employees to work legally in the United States. This is a common-sense idea, and it helps everyone involved: it helps employers make sure they're in compliance with the law; it helps American citizens get hard-earned employment; it helps legal immigrants who play by the rules; and it helps the government enforce those rules.

Yet many prominent Democrats oppose E-Verify. Bernie Sanders [has said](#) he does not support it in its current state, arguing that the system “infringes on security and privacy rights, and places tremendous burdens on workers and employers.”

Take another issue: the enforcement of criminal penalties for people apprehended while crossing the border. When Julián Castro [argued](#) that illegal immigration [shouldn't](#) be a crime at all, a half-dozen other Democratic presidential candidates agreed, including Bernie Sanders and Democratic vice presidential candidate Kamala Harris. This effectively sends a message to the entire world that it's okay to cross America's border illegally. The predictable result is a [surge](#) in illegal immigration that overwhelms

our authorities.

This strains all logic. We need to strengthen the deterrents to crossing the border illegally, not wipe them away. The only way we can enforce our immigration laws is to send a firm message that crossing without permission will not be rewarded—it will be punished.

In recent years, the United States has taken steps that have led to a [decline](#) in [illegal](#) immigration. The Trump administration recently won the cooperation of governments in Mexico and Central America by making it clear that our neighbors to the south must do more to keep their people from violating the law. In concert with other measures, that approach has deterred illegal immigration and eased the pressure on U.S. authorities at our border. These developments are good for the American people and the American system of the rule of law.

## Sanctuary Cities

The challenge of illegal immigration is made worse by the problem of so-called “sanctuary cities.” At first blush, a “sanctuary city” sounds like something to be praised—a safe haven for weary travelers seeking shelter from a storm. In truth, however, calling [them](#) “sanctuaries” is a misleading act of politician-speak.

A “sanctuary city” is a municipality, county, or state that refuses to follow federal law. Specifically, they refuse to cooperate with federal authorities in enforcing the nation’s immigration laws. Today, there are more than [300 such jurisdictions](#) in the United States. For law-abiding citizens, sanctuary cities weaken Americans’ confidence that our government is a government of laws. Sanctuary cities [regularly release](#) undocumented immigrants with criminal backgrounds into the public. Moreover, many thousands of undocumented immigrants released from custody have gone on to [commit](#) additional crimes—including crimes that [victimize](#) the very immigrant communities the cities desire to protect.

[One study](#) of more than 8,000 cases demonstrated the dangerous consequences when sanctuary jurisdictions rebuff federal authorities. It showed that one-fourth of the detained undocumented immigrants sampled were already felons at the time of their release, after which many quickly relapsed into crime. “The 1,867 offenders were arrested 4,298 times during the eight-month period studied,” the study found, “accumulating 7,491 new charges in total, after their release.” This includes murder and other terrible crimes. Had local authorities cooperated with federal detainer requests, these crimes would not have occurred.

Those who commit crimes after release drain a community’s resources, by requiring duplication of law enforcement efforts and expenditures to re-incarcerate. Far from just weary travelers passing through, the ranks of undocumented immigrants released by sanctuary cities also include hardened criminals.

Fixing the problem of sanctuary cities ultimately falls to the federal government. Congress must do its job and ensure that states, counties, and municipalities are complying with federal law. But while Congress fails to act, the only response to jurisdictions that openly flaunt the rules is to take steps like the state of Florida did last year. In the spring of 2019, lawmakers in Tallahassee [passed](#) a law forbidding cities and local communities from adopting policies that limit cooperation with federal immigration officials, effectively outlawing sanctuary cities. This is the responsible thing to do, given the burden that

sanctuary designations place on local communities. Now Congress should follow suit with action of its own.

## Strained Resources

Some jurisdictions not only turn a blind eye to illegal immigration, but actively expand services and benefits to undocumented immigrants. Some even go so far as to provide free health care.

In 2019, California became the first state to [extend](#) the state's Medicaid program to cover young adults who live in the Golden State illegally. While undocumented immigrants will receive free health care costing taxpayers nearly \$100 million per year, law-abiding, middle class Californians who must purchase health insurance on their own face big [penalties](#) if they fail to do so. This is anything but fair. Yet liberals are proposing to expand this policy beyond California. The [2020 Democratic platform](#) calls for extending subsidized government healthcare to millions of undocumented immigrants, as does the [Biden-Sanders Unity Task Force](#).

Undocumented immigrants place a real burden on health care beyond California, too. While they are ineligible for the majority of federal taxpayer programs, all persons, including undocumented immigrants, are guaranteed health care in our nation's emergency rooms. From Seattle to Miami, hospitals across the country [pass](#) much of the cost of caring for undocumented immigrants to privately-insured patients. Almost all of the rest is paid by taxpayers.

The same is true in our nation's schools, where American taxpayers foot the bill to educate undocumented immigrants. It is the [law](#) of the land that every student can attend American public schools, no matter their immigration status. It follows that the larger our undocumented immigrant population, the more of a strain is placed on our nation's teachers, staff, and administrators.

From education to health care to criminal justice, illegal immigration is a burden on law-abiding Americans, including legal immigrants, who pay their taxes and play by the rules. It's time for our leaders to right these wrongs. Unfortunately, after ignoring the issue for far too long, Democrats are now awash in proposals that would make the problem go from bad to worse.

## The Choice on Immigration

Consider the issue of border security. Democratic party leaders have gone on the record saying they will not [support](#)—under any circumstances—extending the physical barriers on the U.S.-Mexico border. Others have said they would “consider the input of experts and local communities before ruling it out.” These are hardly profiles in courage.

As this issue gets more important, the Democrats' positions grow more extreme. During the 2020 Democratic presidential primary, all of the leading candidates – including Joe Biden and Kamala Harris – supported [extending](#) government-run healthcare to undocumented immigrants. And virtually every Democrat wants the government [to provide citizenship](#) to all 11-million-plus undocumented immigrants. This [includes](#) Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.

America faces a choice. Do we want to fix our immigration system by having no system at all, encouraging more illegal immigration in the process? Or do we want to fix what is actually broken and uphold the rule of law? For that matter, do we want our limited financial resources going to those who are here illegally? Or will we support Americans who work hard and pay their taxes?

Some common-sense solutions are obvious. These are simple ideas all Americans can endorse.

First, we must fix the broken asylum system. The United States should not admit more people than our society has the capacity to absorb. We should make the asylum process more efficient by helping courts and judges speed up the process, and we must ensure thorough vetting of asylum claims. We should also work with other governments to address the reasons that people are leaving their homes in the first place, before they ever get to our borders. At the same time, the simple mathematical reality remains that we cannot admit everyone. Granting asylum status only to those who truly merit it will help us craft a system that is sensible.

Second, we should design an immigration system that values skilled workers and professional experience over family ties. We simply do not have the resources to admit the extended family of every refugee or immigrant who comes here legally. Legal immigrants should be granted the opportunity to settle with their nuclear family, the building block of our society. At the same time, we should end chain migration. This means welcoming spouses and dependent children but drawing a line thereafter.

Skilled workers enhance our economic competitiveness and improve our global standing. Our visa system should prioritize admittance to these professionals, so America can maintain its place as a beacon for the world's best and brightest. Canada and Australia have led the way with points-based systems that prioritize high-skilled applicants who possess language skills. The United States can learn from both countries.

Third, we must enact the obvious. Simple ideas like mandatory E-Verify will greatly improve our ability to enforce our laws. Securing our border, through physical barriers that utilize cutting-edge technologies and other methods of enforcement, will ensure the orderly admission of people. Eliminating sanctuary cities will ensure that municipalities are working to assist, rather than undermine, our federal authorities.

## **An Immigration System Worthy of America**

Ultimately, immigration policy is about the rule of law. But it's also about reflecting what's best in America, our values and our traditions. We are a land that welcomes people who want to abide by the law, build up our communities, and bring their talents to bear on making America a better place for all. Generations of legal immigrants have done exactly that; the door should still be open to those who want to follow in their footsteps.

The current immigration system falls woefully short of this noble goal. Congress must play the leading role in fixing what's broken. By addressing its problems with common-sense solutions, we can create an immigration system that not only works for America, but is worthy of America.