



Grassroots Action Kit
For “Families United Congressional Visits”

In-District Visits with Members of Congress
During the April Congressional Recess (April 4 – April 19)

To Win Just and Humane Immigration Reform in 2009

Thank you for participating in “Families United Congressional Visits,” a coast-to-coast effort where hundreds of grassroots leaders will meet with their Members of Congress during the April Congressional recess (Apr. 4-Apr. 19) to keep families united and push the passage of Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2009. This brief kit will give you the basic information you need before, during and after your meetings.

What are we trying to do?

We need to win Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2009: the time is now, and it’s the right thing to do. To get there, we need to reach the crucial number of 279 votes: that is, 218 votes in the House of Representatives, 60 votes in the Senate, and 1 President.

We need to make sure that your Senator and Representative will do the right thing for our families, our communities, our values and our economy, and that they express their support to another crucial player: President Barack Obama.

That’s why immigrant advocates will be holding hundreds of meetings with our Members of Congress in April, and will ask them to send a public letter to President Obama urging Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2009.

This is a nationwide effort: across the country, thousands of families and communities have banded around the call to win a Just and Humane Immigration Reform in 2009. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus is sponsoring a 17-city “Families United” tour, where thousands of US citizens have signed petitions to President Barack Obama on behalf of their family members who are undocumented. Because of our current immigration mess, millions of families have either been separated because of immigration raids, remain separated because of our unjust visa backlog, or risk being separated because of deportation.

To set up your own meeting during the April Congressional recess, follow these easy steps:

BEFORE THE MEETING

Find out who represents you in Congress. Go to www.senate.gov and www.house.gov to find out who your Senators and Representatives are.

Do the Background Check. Refer to online biographical sketches or check campaign statements, news articles or additional sources of information to learn the Member of Congress' occupation, religion, political and social memberships, areas of interest, and positions on issues such as the economy, health care, the environment – as well as immigration. This information can help inform how you approach your meeting.

Check in with Allies in DC or at a state organization: There are valuable resources in Washington, DC and elsewhere with background knowledge on the roles that Representative and Senators played in past rounds of immigration reform. If you are part of a national or regional/state network or organization, we encourage you to talk with your point person on immigration. Please let this organization know that you have scheduled the visit with the specific US Representative or Senator.

Scheduling a Meeting: Call and ask to speak to the member's scheduler in your home state/district, or write a letter to request a meeting during the April recess (April 4-April 19). A sample letter to request a meeting is attached. When you speak to the scheduler, explain that:

- You are a constituent from X (city or town in their district/state).
- You would like to set up an appointment to meet with your Representative/Senator (or his/her staff) and are interested in discussing immigration.
- You will be attending the meeting with X number of leaders and/or students from your state/district.

If the office does not respond to you, call or write again and be persistent! Remember that they are public servants.

Determine Who Should Be in the Meeting. Who best represents your organization or coalition that can also help to build a relationship with this Member of Congress? Are there close allies that could build trust or respect with this Member of Congress, if they came? Is there a family that is directly affected by our unjust immigration laws? Be sure to assign roles to participants, including the lead/facilitator.

Prepare your materials. Included in this Grassroots Action Kit are materials you should give to your Member of Congress:

- 1) The suggested letter that we are asking the Member of Congress to send to President Obama
- 2) Talking points about the need for Immigration Reform in 2009
- 3) 2 Fact sheets about immigration and the economy
- 4) Quotes from President Obama and other leaders about their support for Comprehensive Immigration Reform
- 5) A sample letter to request a meeting with your Members of Congress

You may also want to include other materials, such as news clippings of a local pro-immigration reform event.

DURING THE MEETING

Credential and introduce yourselves. In 5 minutes or less, explain what groups are represented, their membership, and other information that the Member or staffer should know about those who attend the meeting. Share your stories: what connects you to this issue, why is it important for your family or community?

Get the card and contact information for any staffers you meet with.

Ask the US Representative or Senator if they will sign and send a letter to President Obama urging the passage of immigration reform in 2009.

Listen well. Make sure you do not do all of the talking. Much of lobbying is listening, looking for indications of the legislator's views, and finding opportunities to provide good information. Give your legislator opportunities to ask questions or state his or her opinion. Members and staff will appreciate the chance to be heard. Also, ask questions. We've included suggested questions in this packet.

Follow these general talking points (there are more talking points at the end of this packet in the "10 Reasons to Enact Immigration Reform this Year"):

- The immigration system is badly broken: it splits our families and hurts our communities
- The need for Comprehensive Immigration Reform is urgent, and the time for reform is now, this year, in 2009.

Take notes.

If the Member asks a question, answer honestly. If you don't know the answer, say that you don't know but you will find out, and then be sure to follow up.

AFTER THE MEETING

Send a thank you email or note. Include additional materials or provide additional answers to questions that came up during the meeting. Follow up on anything you promised.

Document your meeting with the campaign. If you are part of a national organization or network, please report to that organization. If you are not, please report back about your meeting online, using an easy website:

<http://www.blueskycollaborative.com/nif/survey2/survey.asp>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Charles Abbott at the National Immigration Forum, tel (202) 383-5995 or email cabbott@immigrationforum.org.

Necessary Question to Ask US Representatives and Senators:

Will you send President Obama the letter urging Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2009?

Suggested Questions to Ask US Representatives and Senators:

- Where do you stand on Comprehensive Immigration Reform?
- If the Member has been supportive of our issues in the past, **THANK HIM/HER.**
- What is your top priority or the issue about which you feel the most passionate? (Useful in figuring out openings for approaching the immigration issue.)
- For immigrant communities and our allies, keeping families united and passing immigration reform in 2009 is a must. What do you think of the need to pass immigration reform this year?
- Did you know that most polls show the majority of people support a legalization program because they want immigrants to get right with the law, pay their taxes, and learn English?
- What do you hear from your constituents about immigration?
- Was immigration an issue in their most recent campaign for office?
- Do you agree that the immigration system is broken? Do you think mass deportations are realistic? What role do you think Congress should play in fixing the broken system?
- What would it take to get you to support a comprehensive reform package, including the DREAM Act?
- [A question for a member who already supports immigration reform:] How can we help you move comprehensive reform in this session?

Additional Questions for New Members:

- How can we help you get up to speed on this issue? What additional materials would be useful? Do you have a staffer who will be assigned to handle immigration (you should!)?

Suggested letter to Obama to be signed by Members of Congress:

DATE

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

I look forward to working with you to pass and sign a Just and Humane Immigration Reform legislation in 2009 that will prevent the separation of families, secure our nation and restore our economy. I am also committed to working with you to address serious concerns that my constituents have brought to my attention with regard to past actions by the Department of Homeland Security, including the treatment of detainees, due process, federal-local immigration enforcement agreements and the conduct of raids in worksites and immigrant communities.

I am encouraged by your leadership and statements on this issue during your campaign and in the early months of your Administration. Immigration reform must remain an early priority in your Administration, and I hope that you will clearly communicate your commitment to this issue in the coming weeks. Our nation urgently needs an effective and practical immigration system that can reflect the best of America's values.

Sincerely,

[Member of Congress]



Ten Reasons to Enact Comprehensive Immigration Reform THIS YEAR

America Needs Immigration Reform

Our immigration system is fundamentally broken; fixing it will help us rebuild our faltering economy. Our failure to systematically address major aspects of immigration law and policy—for both legal and illegal immigration—has resulted in a system that is bad for the economy, undercuts laws protecting workers, undermines security, and wastes human potential. Smart immigration reform will help us rebuild our economy, eliminate wasteful spending on enforcement schemes that don't work, redirect our limited resources towards genuine threats to our nation, make it harder for employers to exploit workers or undermine the working conditions for all workers, while restoring dignity and trust to the process of determining who can be in this country legally.

America Needs Immigration Reform This Year

We continue to allocate billions for immigration enforcement without addressing the fundamental problems of our system. Not only are we throwing good money after bad, but we are failing to take advantage of tools that can restore American prosperity and respect. The problems that we face—escalating violence on the border, a shadow economy that depresses all wages and exploits vulnerable workers, deaths in detention, millions of adults and young people whose true potential is wasted, and the separation of families for years (and in some cases, decades) grows worse with each day and will continue to grow worse until we address the fundamental problems.

An Effective Immigration Reform Bill Will Be Smart, Tough, and Fair.

A successful immigration reform bill will need to: provide a path to legality for undocumented people currently in the U.S., use smart enforcement strategies that manage the border and monitor employers who hire outside the system, eliminate backlogs in family immigration, ensure that due process and civil rights are respected in all immigration programs, protect the interests of workers and employers by addressing management of the future demand for workers when the economy improves, and ensure immigrant integration programs are functional and well-funded. Each of these pieces play a role in a lasting solution to end illegal immigration; they must be addressed together to ensure that we aren't fighting this same battle ten years from now.

The Immigration Reform We Need Will Help All of America's Workers.

The vast majority of the approximately twelve million undocumented immigrants in this country are already working. As long as there is no path to legality, they will remain vulnerable to unscrupulous employers who will cheat the system by abusing workers and violating labor laws. This shadowy economy artificially depresses wages for all workers. Historically, wages overall have risen following a legalization program. When people are moving through the system rather than around it, they are paying more taxes, contributing more to the economy, and making deeper commitments to buy homes and put down roots. All of these things are a net gain for the country.

The Immigration Reform We Need Includes a Legalization Program.

A successful program will be a mix of flexibility and strong requirements. People should come forward, register with the government, and get work authorization. Following a period of work or other contributions, they should be required to learn English, pay taxes, and pay the appropriate fines or penalties deemed necessary to become lawful permanent residents.

The Immigration Reform We Need Will Address Agricultural Work and Higher Education.

AgJOBS and the Dream Act are important components of legalization, as well as models for broader approaches, and should be included in any reform bill. AgJOBS is a model of how business and labor can come together on a solution to address labor shortages without undermining American workers. It provides a well-balanced solution for agriculture's rapidly changing demand for farm workers. The DREAM Act offers a legalization program for young people brought to the U.S. as children and who graduate from U.S. high schools and then complete mandatory college requirements or military service. It recognizes the tremendous contributions these young people already make to society and their communities; it gives them a legal way to realize their potential and maximize their future contributions to our country.

The Immigration Reform We Need Will Be Comprehensive.

One of the reasons the immigration debate has been so difficult is that a very small number of people—in Congress and in the public—want to extract an extremely high price for any improvement of the immigration system. Thus far, those people have used every attempt at immigration reform as an opportunity to penalize and criminalize the actions of all immigrants. We know that most members of Congress want to do the right thing; we know that the American public wants reform; but we also know that building the support and generating the enthusiasm needed to fight anti-immigrant sentiment takes enormous concentration and focus. Our best shot for achieving a legislative victory—and for fighting off the anti-immigrant spoilers—is to band together to get what we all want and need at once.

The Immigration Reform We Need Will Be Balanced.

A successful comprehensive bill will balance our current need to gain control of our immigration system with our future need to set limits that best serve our nation, while focusing our enforcement so that it is effective and fair. It will deal with undocumented immigrants in a reasonable manner, and in doing so, it will put all workers on an equal footing so that unscrupulous employers cannot take advantage of the vulnerability of some workers to the detriment of all. It will make adjustments to our visa system to better align it with the needs of our economy and the needs of American families, and it will redirect our enforcement priorities to focus on those who would do us harm while respecting the due process rights that underpin our laws.

Immigration Reform Can Happen This Year.

The stars are aligning in our favor. President Obama continues to support immigration reform as a priority for his first year in office; he has recently affirmed this in three separate radio interviews. The White House has appointed numerous top officials and leaders, like Janet Napolitano (and Esther Olavarria, former immigration counsel to Sen. Kennedy), who understand immigration and have worked to create bi-partisan solutions. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus, the Progressive Caucus, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and members of the Congressional Black Caucus are vocal and supportive on immigration issues and realize that failing to act is both an institutional and moral crisis. Earlier this year, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) bill was signed into law with a provision restoring the opportunity for states to provide health insurance to kids with legal status—a victory that has taken 13 years to accomplish. SCHIP also demonstrated the growing strength of the immigration reform movement. We are bigger, better funded, more organized, and more committed than ever. The momentum is building and people want to be a part of it.

There Will Be Political Consequences to Inaction on Immigration Reform.

Voters respond to leaders and candidates who offer real solution to this problem. In 22 of the 25 battleground House races where immigration was a central issue in the last election, the victor was not the anti-immigration candidate, but the one who supported reform. Demographics are changing; the Hispanic vote and other new American votes are becoming essential voting blocs in many districts. Immigration is no longer a poison pill; it is an opportunity to show voters that Congress can face difficult problems and solve them in a way that works for the nation.



IMMIGRATION POLICY CENTER

...providing factual information about immigration and immigrants in America

THE ECONOMICS OF IMMIGRATION REFORM

Legalization increases government revenues by bringing ALL workers into the tax system.

- The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [estimated](#) that **\$66 billion in new revenue over 10 years** would have been generated if the 2006 immigration reform bill, which would have legalized most of our undocumented population, had passed.
- New legal immigrants to the U.S. would provide a **net benefit of \$407 billion to the Social Security system over 50 years**, according to a [study](#) by the National Foundation for American Policy.
- The “underground” construction workforce in New York City represented **\$342 million in lost tax revenue** in 2005 because of employers who paid workers “off the books,” according to a [study](#) by the Fiscal Policy Institute.

Workers with legal status earn and spend more.

- Undocumented workers who were legalized in 1986 paid more in taxes and spent more because their **wages increased by roughly 15% after five years**.

“Enforcement-only” policies are expensive and don’t work.

- Even though **spending on immigration enforcement has skyrocketed, the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. tripled to 12 million** between 1990 and 2008.
- The CBO [estimated](#) that a mandatory “E-Verify” employment-verification program would **decrease federal revenue by \$17.3 billion over 10 years** because more workers would be paid “off the books.”
- Trying to deport 10 million undocumented immigrants would cost **at least \$206 billion over five years**, according to a [study](#) by the Center for American Progress.

Legalization adds to immigration’s economic benefits.

- The [White House Council of Economic Advisers](#) concluded that immigration **increases the U.S. Gross Domestic Product by \$37 billion each year**.
- **9 in 10 native-born workers experience wage gains** because of immigration, according to a Giovanni Peri [study](#).
- **Latino buying power** totaled **\$951 billion in 2008** and is expected to increase to \$1.4 trillion by 2013.
- **Asian buying power** totaled **\$509.1 billion in 2008** and is expected to increase to \$752.3 billion by 2013.
- 1.6 million **Hispanic-owned firms** provided jobs to 1.5 million employees and had receipts of \$222 billion, in 2002.
- 1.1 million **Asian-owned firms** provided jobs to 2.2 million employees and had receipts of \$326.4 billion, in 2002.



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TALKING POINTS

IMMIGRATION REFORM & ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Americans want immigration reform that promotes economic recovery.

- [By a 2-1 margin](#), the American public believes that requiring undocumented workers to register, get legal, and pay taxes is better for America's economy than requiring 7 million workers to leave the U.S.
- Requiring undocumented workers to become legal taxpayers will create a level playing field for all workers and employers and will promote economic recovery.
- Legalization will close the trap door at the bottom of the wage scale and help lift wages for all workers.

The current system empowers bad-apple employers and distorts economic conditions for all employers.

- A few bad-apple employers undercut honest competitors, avoid paying their fair share of taxes, and drive down wages and working conditions for all workers.
- When 5% of the U.S. workforce lacks legal status, bad-actor employers can manipulate and exploit a significant segment of the workforce to the detriment of all workers.
- Legalizing workers will cut the legs out from under exploitive employers and generate critical revenues needed to advance economic recovery.

Reform that regulates our globally integrated labor market will protect honest American businesses that want to hire needed immigrant workers.

- We need to look beyond the current crisis and recognize that immigrant workers will help our economy get back on its feet, as they always have in our nation's history.
- By creating legal channels for workers to come in the future, we will be protecting U.S. workers from unfair competition while facilitating long-term economic growth and innovation.

Reform that enables DHS to prioritize security threats will make us safer and help our bottom line.

- Reform that legalizes the undocumented workforce and creates legal channels for future workers will allow us to focus resources on real security threats.
- Instead of throwing billions of taxpayer dollars into the pursuit of busboys, immigration reform will increase revenues for state and local governments at a time of massive budget deficits.

Immigration reform pays for itself, and then some.

- **The 2006 immigration reform bill, which included a legalization program, would have more than paid for itself through increased tax revenue.** The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) [estimated](#) that, as originally introduced on April 7, 2006, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 would have raised \$66 billion in new revenue during 2007-2016 from income and payroll taxes, as well as various administrative fees.
- **The 2007 immigration reform bill, which included a legalization program, would have more than paid for itself through increased tax revenue.** The CBO and JCT [estimated](#) that the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007, as amended by the Senate through May 24, 2007, would have generated \$48 billion in new revenue during 2008-2017, primarily through Social Security payroll taxes.

The President of the United States Supports Comprehensive Immigration Reform

“You've got to earn it. But over time you give people an opportunity.”
(Costa Mesa, CA Town Hall, 3/18/09)

[H]ere's what I believe: We are a nation of immigrants, number one.

Number two, we do have to have control of our borders.

Number three that people who have been here for a long time and put down roots here have to have some mechanism over time to get out of the shadows, because if they stay in the shadows, in the underground economy, then they are oftentimes pitted against American workers. Since they can't join a union, they can't complain about minimum wages, et cetera, they end up being abused, and that depresses the wages of everybody, all Americans.

So I don't think that we can do this [immigration reform] piecemeal. I think what we have to do is to come together and say, we're going to strengthen our borders....We have to combine that with cracking down on employers who are exploiting undocumented workers.

We have to make sure that there's a verification system to find out whether somebody is legally able to work here or not. But we have to make sure that that verification system does not discriminate just because you've got a Hispanic last name or your last name is Obama. ... And then you've got to say to the undocumented workers, you have to say, look, you've broken the law; you didn't come here the way you were supposed to. So this is not going to be a free ride. It's not going to be some instant amnesty. What's going to happen is you are going to pay a significant fine. You are going to learn English.

You are going to... go to the back of the line so that you don't get ahead of somebody who was in Mexico City applying legally. But after you've done these things over a certain period of time you can earn your citizenship, so that it's not -- it's not something that is guaranteed or automatic. You've got to earn it. But over time you give people an opportunity.

Now, it only works though if you do all the pieces. I think the American people, they appreciate and believe in immigration. But they can't have a situation where you just have half a million people pouring over the border without any kind of mechanism to control it. So we've got to deal with that at the same time as we deal in a humane fashion with folks who are putting down roots here, have become our neighbors, have become our friends, they may have children who are U.S. citizens. That's the kind of comprehensive approach that we have to take.

—President Obama, [Costa Mesa Town Hall Meeting](#), 3/18/09

Key National Leaders Support Comprehensive Immigration Reform

...[T]he arrow is pointing in a different direction in relation to immigration politics in this country.

—**White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel**, [Interview with Hispanic Media](#), 2/6/09

I have been firmly committed to immigration reform for a long time now, look no further than the angry messages and letters I receive to prove it. I remain hopeful. I am committed to offering this year comprehensive immigration reform that is strong, practical and fair.

— **Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV)**, [speech to the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Legislative Conference](#), 3/12/09

Our future is about our children...No matter if those families arrived two days ago or centuries ago, that opportunity, that determination, that hope has made America more American. Taking parents from their children ... that's un-American.

—**Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)**, [prayer vigil in San Francisco](#),
3/8/09

[W]e need to have a comprehensive approach to illegal immigration. That includes a guest worker program. That includes securing our borders, and it includes putting people on a path to citizenship, that they're behind everybody else, that ...they have to pay fines, et cetera, et cetera.

—**Senator John McCain (R-AZ)**, [CNN](#), 2/15/09

As you know, the current U.S. immigration system undermines national security and erodes the integrity of our laws. The federal government's failure to enact comprehensive immigration reform also places an undue burden on state and local governments by encouraging a policy patchwork of immigration laws and approaches. Immigration reform must remain a priority in the months ahead, and we hope that you will clearly communicate your commitment on this issue.

—**Representatives Jeff Flake (R-AZ) and Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ)**, [letter to President Obama](#), 3/19/09

One of the most important steps that Washington can do to promote economic growth in the long term is to fix our broken immigration system ...[to] fully recover the state of our economy would require a national immigration policy that is based on reality, not on politics. ... We can not allow for the economic recession to pose as another excuse for inaction on immigration. As the Obama administration confronts the country's current challenges, we hope to work with the President and Congress to create an immigration system that would strengthen our economy, protect our borders and honor our values

—**New York City Mayor Bloomberg**, [El Diario/La Prensa](#), 3/9/09

Sample Letter or Email to Request an Appointment during the April Congressional Recess

The Honorable (Member of Congress Name)
United States Senate (or United States House of Representatives)
District office address and city
Fax number or email address: [This letter should be faxed or e-mailed, not mailed]

Dear Senator (Last Name) or Dear Representative (Last Name):

As a constituent of [your State or your District], [your organization] is writing to request a meeting with you during the upcoming Congressional recess between April 4 and April 19.

We would like to talk with you about the need for Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2009. We are part of a nationwide effort to keep Families United and win Comprehensive Immigration Reform this year.

We hope you will take the time to meet with us to listen to our perspective and concerns and have a dialogue with you. We look forward to meeting with you. Please contact [your organizational contact] to set up a meeting. They can be reached at [phone and e-mail]. We will also follow up with your office.

Sincerely,

Name
City, State
Phone and e-mail