

Comprehensive Immigration Reform: Let Me Repeat the Cliché – "The Devil Is in the Details"

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I have already seen the well-worn cliché, "the devil is in the details," four times attributed to Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR). It makes sense. Everybody seems to agree that Comprehensive Immigration Reform is necessary; but all are worried that it will be extremely difficult to come to an understanding of what Comprehensive Immigration Reform should look like!

Perhaps a better analogy to describe CIR is the tale of the eight blind men who were asked to touch an elephant and describe what it looks like, each coming up with a vastly different description. In a number of public forums, I have described why the problem of resolving CIR is so much more difficult than other seemingly intractable problems. For most issues, take the economic crisis as an example, there are two opposing world views or positions. To come to a solution, the parties must find a middle ground. They may have a terrifically difficult time reaching that middle ground, but almost everybody has a general idea of what that middle ground is and what the solution will ultimately be.

This is not the case with Comprehensive Immigration Reform where there are not two sides but, perhaps, ten different sides, zones of interest and issues of concern to particular constituencies and groups. All, or nearly all, of these components must be taken into account in order to come up with a CIR solution.

What we see now are many different groups marking their territories and staking out their positions for the battle ahead.

- First to go on record was a bipartisan group of senators, including Senators Charles Schumer, John McCain, Dick Durbin, Lindsey Graham, Robert Menendez, Marco Rubio, Michael Bennett and Jeff Flake, enunciating basic principles that include a "tough but fair" path to citizenship; reforming our legal immigration system; creating an effective employment verification system; and establishing an

improved process for admitting future workers.

- Then President Obama went on record identifying his goals, including improvement to enforcement and border security; a path to "earned" legalization and citizenship; and bringing our legal immigration system into the 21st century.
- Senators Hatch, Klobuchar, Rubio and Coons introduced the Immigration Innovation Act, focusing on business immigration, expanding availability of H-1B visas and making them easier to use, and increasing immigrant visa availability for employment-based applicants.
- Next, Senator Grassley introduced a bill, "The Accountability Through Electronic Verification Act," that seeks to make E-verify mandatory for all U.S. employers.
- Further, *The New York Times* reported that a bipartisan group in the House of Representatives has been meeting secretly to put together its own proposal for Comprehensive Immigration Reform.
- On February 5, President Obama held a meeting at the White House with labor and business leaders to discuss and build support for his immigration overhaul proposals.
- On the same day, Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), head of the House Judiciary Committee, conducted hearings on immigration reform, and the Senate Judiciary Committee has scheduled its own hearings for February 13.

I am sure it will not stop there!

In my view, the biggest obstacle to Comprehensive Immigration Reform is that there are passionate groups against almost every one of its critical components, even if both Democrats and Republicans recognize that CIR is critical to their respective agendas.

Specifically, there is a hard-core group that is adverse to bringing immigrants into the United States in any form whatsoever and will seek to oppose immigration reform in any way possible.

There are those who are dead set against any path to residence and/or citizenship for undocumented aliens, which they see as an inappropriate "amnesty", however it might be packaged.

Further, there are those who passionately oppose improvements in the "business immigration" categories, with no sympathy to the needs of business, viewing any increase in visas as hurting U.S. workers.

There are those who see tightened control at the borders and increasing enforcement against individual immigrants as biased, discriminatory and in violation of individual rights.

Perhaps the only provision that all agree upon, or at least pay lip service to, is cracking down on employers hiring undocumented workers.

So, am I really that pessimistic about whether Comprehensive Immigration Reform will come about? I don't know. The real mystery is whether enough senators and congressmen will be able to see the big picture and recognize that Comprehensive Immigration Reform is critical and essential to the future of our country.

Let the games begin, and let us all hope that the United States is the victor.