



[Editorial: Obama's Bold Step On Immigration Reform](#)

Posted on November 23, 2009 by [Robert A. Kraft](#)

This excellent editorial appeared recently in the [Dallas Morning News](#):

The Obama administration deserves credit for tenacity. Like Rocky Balboa after being battered and bloodied by successive bouts on Capitol Hill over health care and the economy, the administration keeps coming back for more. Now comes Barocky III: Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano announced Friday that the administration will seek to overhaul the immigration system early next year. She wants a tighter law to punish illegal immigrants and the employers who hire them, improved measures to encourage migrants to choose the legal route, and a "tough but fair" pathway for the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in this country to legalize their status.

The last time such a feat was attempted, in 2007, President George W. Bush was abandoned by his party and suffered a crushing defeat in the Senate. There's no assurance President Barack Obama will fare any better, despite his party's Capitol Hill majority. Bipartisan cooperation in writing the new bill also is no guarantee of success.

To fend off conservative attacks that this measure would amount to nothing more than amnesty, Obama must put strong emphasis on the toughness of his proposed legalization procedures. Napolitano says that the legalization process could take years to complete and would involve rigorous procedures to verify that an applicant has no criminal background, has learned English and has fully paid back taxes and substantial fines for entering the country illegally.

Since illegal immigrants come here looking for work, she says, the bill will seek stiffer punishments for employers who hire them. Napolitano also promises tighter border enforcement, even though illegal crossings already have dropped significantly. The Border Patrol has grown by 20,000 officers, and more than 600 miles of border fencing has been installed, fulfilling two key benchmarks set by Congress in 2007.

Having supported the Bush plan, this newspaper believes that the Obama administration is on the right track, particularly with its decision to press the issue sooner rather than wait until after next November's elections. The timing here shows admirable political guts.

There are upsides. Approval could generate support from an increasingly important Hispanic electorate. By drawing illegal immigrants out of the shadows, the new law promises to add workers to the tax rolls and increase American blue-collar labor's competitiveness by ensuring that they won't be undercut by cheaper illegal workers. If illegal immigrants don't want to comply, their room to maneuver in the job market would diminish while their incentives to go home would jump dramatically.

The nation's immigration system has limped along, broken for far too long, but there should be no illusions that fixing it will be easy. As Capitol Hill bouts go, this fight looks to be a bruiser.