

Reboot the debate

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

Rep. Brian Bilbray, R-Calif., believes Congress has a credibility deficit when it comes to combating illegal immigration. He's right. The politicking of recent years has produced heated rhetoric and snappy sound bites, but no solutions. Yet, Congress does not bolster its credibility when it approaches the problem of illegal immigration with feel-good, unrealistic, enforcement-only half-measures that fail to deal with the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants already in the country.

Unfortunately, that's what we have now in a well-intentioned but ultimately inadequate bill called the Secure America with Verification and Enforcement Act, co-sponsored by Bilbray and Rep. Heath Shuler, D-N.C.

The good news, however, is that Bilbray and Shuler are part of a growing chorus in Congress who want to reboot the immigration debate.

The bad news is that a lot of what many lawmakers wind up proposing has too much of those things we don't need and not enough of those things we do. The SAVE Act fits this pattern. The bill proposes hiring 8,000 new U.S. Border Patrol agents when we already have problems hiring the agents approved by earlier legislation. Border Patrol supervisors have warned they don't have the supervisors to train and monitor all these new agents that politicians keep calling for. At the same time, the SAVE bill is missing any meaningful employer sanctions, such as fines, penalties or jail time, as well as a secure, tamper-proof identification card to help employers determine who is eligible to work and who isn't. House members are considering a discharge petition to get the SAVE Act to the floor, thereby reviving the immigration debate. We support the petition and the restarting of the debate, but the bill itself needs much work before it will be a comprehensive solution to the immigration problem.

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