

# Real immigration reform will vault over border fence

BY [TAMAR JACOBY](#)

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The TV news clips said it all – or seemed to. First the camera panned along a few yards of existing border fence. Then came a shot of the Senate debating whether to build 700 miles more of it, followed by the final vote 80-19 in favor of the fence.

No wonder many people concluded that the immigration hard-liners in the House, where the fence bill originated, had won the debate.

But they're wrong. For most members of Congress, this was little more than an election-year charade. The truth is, one mug-for-the-camera vote will not reverse the progress made in the past two years toward comprehensive immigration reform, which is still the only way to solve the problem.

By now, the two competing visions are clear to everyone: simply cracking down harder with fencing and other measures, or combining more effective enforcement with more realistic laws – laws that recognize our labor needs, current and future, and offer some long-term path to legal citizenship for the illegal immigrants already here.

Lopsided fence votes in the House and Senate belie growing support for that broader vision. It's not just that the President and many senators support balanced reform. Poll after poll shows that between two-thirds and three-quarters of the public believes that the best answer combines tougher enforcement with earned citizenship for the illegal immigrants already here. The 20% to 25% who feel differently have an outsized influence in this midterm election year. But even if that tail can wag the dog for now, it can't prevent the majority from expressing its will eventually.

And make no mistake: The problem isn't going away. Unlike with, say, Social Security, Congress will be under pressure to get back to the issue and solve it, if not in November, then next year.

The hard-liners are right about one thing – we do need to get control of the border. But its symbolic value aside, an old-fashioned metal fence is far from the best way to do that. What's needed on the border is the combination package of sophisticated technology – sensors, drones, electronic trip wires and high-tech coordination – already contracted out to the defense firm Boeing.

And the most important place for a crackdown isn't on the border at all: It's in the workplace, where we need a national electronic verification system to help employers tell the difference between who's authorized to work and who isn't.

Combine all that with more realistic laws – as is, some half a million foreigners enter the country a year to do unskilled jobs, yet we issue only 5,000 year-round visas for that kind of work – and we might have a chance of honestly confronting the problem.

But the members of Congress voting for the fence weren't thinking about that. They were thinking about the campaign ads they'll be making next week. And, right now, either they don't trust themselves or they don't trust voters enough to try to make the case for a truly workable solution.

*Jacoby is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.*

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