

*The Washington Times* ran an [op-ed](#) by Congressman Pence on immigration today. In the op-ed, Congressman Pence talks about why the Senate immigration bill failed and what he thinks needs to be done on the issue now.

The entire op-ed is below:

Why I was opposed

By Mike Pence

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Last year, President Bush set out his views on immigration reform to the American people, saying there must be "a rational middle ground between granting an automatic path to citizenship for every illegal immigrant, and a program of mass deportation."

I agree with the president that a rational middle ground can be found between automatic citizenship and mass deportation, but the amnesty bill that was defeated in the Senate was not the middle ground.

I opposed the Senate immigration bill because of its core fallacy that millions of illegal immigrants could get right with the law without having to leave the country. For most Americans, and me, that is amnesty and I cannot support it.

Different from last year's Senate compromise, this Senate bill included provisions that appeared to require illegal immigrants to leave the country, but that simply was not the case. Even several major news organizations characterized this "touchback" provision as mandatory.

But the Senate bill only included a requirement that Z Visa holders return to the U.S. Consulate in their country of origin if they wanted to apply for a green card, which was strictly optional. Under the Senate bill, illegals could obtain a Z Visa, which was renewable indefinitely, simply by paying a fine and passing a background check. Z Visa holders never were required to leave the country to get right with the law.

The purpose of requiring illegal immigrants to leave the country to get right with the law is not simply to do a quick "touchback." That is a gimmick. The purpose of leaving the country to get right with the law is to require people to apply for the legal right to enter the United States in the same way all other visa applicants apply to come into the United States.

If a person applies from outside of the country and is denied, then the person does not need to be deported because he or she is already gone. If the person, however, applies from outside the country and is accepted, which would mean the person passed a background check and a health screening and has a job, that person has corrected his or her original illegal act and has been granted legal entry to America without amnesty.

While I strongly opposed the Senate immigration bill, I am not against every version of immigration reform. Last year, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison and I proposed a no-amnesty solution

to the illegal immigration crisis, and I believe it still holds promise if Congress makes another attempt at immigration reform this year.

Any future effort at immigration reform must reflect the following four-step process:

Securing our border is the first step. As President Reagan said, "A nation without borders is not a nation." Therefore, we must make America a nation with borders. We must man the door. No temporary worker program should begin until border security measures are completed. The border must continue to be certified as secure for a temporary worker program to continue.

The second step is to decide, once and for all, to deny amnesty to people whose first act in the United States was a violation of the law by requiring all illegal immigrants to leave the country to get right with the law.

The third step is to put in place a temporary worker program, without amnesty, that will establish "Ellis Island Centers" outside the country where private sector employment firms can match employers with willing temporary workers who pass a background check and learn English.

The final step is tough employer sanctions and an employment verification system that ensures a full partnership between American business and the U.S. government in enforcing our immigration laws.

I opposed the Senate immigration bill because I believe we can solve the crisis of illegal immigration without amnesty or a massive new federal bureaucracy.

Now that the Senate has defeated its flawed version of immigration reform, I hope the House will take a fresh look at the issue. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced her desire to see a bipartisan immigration reform bill. If she is looking for consensus, I believe this four-part plan is a template for reform that those opposing amnesty can embrace. I believe this proposal offers a solution that those calling for humane treatment of the illegal aliens in our midst can embrace. And I believe this solution is one the American people can embrace. It is the real rational middle ground.

Mike Pence, an Indiana Republican, is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.