**Recent Immigration Reform Proposals from the 113th Congress**

**Terms to Know**

**Pathway to Citizenship:** Provides a way for undocumented immigrants to attain citizenship. Most proposals require background checks, payment of back taxes, and fluency in English as criteria for eligibility. Most proposals also contain intermediary steps such as new legal status or permanent legal status before the citizenship process begins. Additionally, supporters of a pathway to citizenship want to ensure “no uncertainty” for eligible immigrants on whether or not they will attain citizenship.

**Employer Verification:** Requires employers to verify the legal status of their employees. Most proposals include mandatory use of the E-Verify system for medium to large business within two to three years of the bill’s passage. Currently, 20 states mandate that some business use the E-Verify system, which has become more accurate recently. 96% of all immigration checks made through the system were found to be accurate.

**Border Security:** Recent proposals have made a pathway to citizenship contingent on enhanced border security. Plans to improve border security include investments in border infrastructure and an increase in border security agents. However, studies have shown that raising the level of security along the border couldn’t happen until 2019 and would cost twice the amount spent in 2012, roughly $28 billion a year. Reports have also shown that the level of illegal border crossings decreases substantially when the Mexican economy performs better, as it has been recently. This raises questions about the cost effectiveness of additional border security spending.

**STEM Education and High Skilled Immigrants:** STEM stands for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Currently, H1-B visas are issued for skilled workers. They are capped at 65,000 for all workers and 20,000 for workers with a master’s degree or higher. Nonprofit organizations, governmental research institutions, and universities are exempt from this cap. Demand for these visas far outpaces the current cap of 85,000. H1-B Visas can only be issued for established business. Opening them to potential entrepreneurs is a policy gaining significant attention because of its job creation potential.

**“DREAMers”:** Unauthorized immigrants who are under the age of 31; entered the United States before age 16; have lived continuously in the country for at least five years; have not been convicted of a felony, a “significant” misdemeanor, or three other misdemeanors; and are currently in school, graduated from high school, earned a GED, or served in the military.

**Proposals:**

**White House:** The White House recently leaked its backup plan in case Congressional negotiators fail to reach an agreement. The plan includes four pillars, border security, an improved legal immigration process, earned citizenship, and employer verification.

**Border Security:** The plan would improve border infrastructure, give DHS and ICE better tools to remove criminals and prosecute security threats, and hire more border security agents.

**Legal Immigration:** The plan would increase the number of visas available to potential entrepreneurs, help graduate students with STEM educations stay in the U.S, and aim to reunite families.

**Earned Citizenship:** The White House plan would create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who pass a background check, pay back taxes, and demonstrate English proficiency. These applicants would go to “the back of the line.” Undocumented immigrants would receive legal residency after eight years and would be eligible for a Lawful Prospective Immigrant Visa. The proposal would ensure “no uncertainty” in a path to citizenship if the immigrant is eligible. There would be a separate and hastened process for “Dreamers.”

**Senate:** Senate negotiators have been working on a proposal that is similar to the White House’s plan. It includes a path to citizenship, a revamp of the current legal immigration system, employer verification, and a new program for agricultural laborers.

**Path to Citizenship:** The plan includes a “tough but fair” path to citizenship that begins with a probationary legal status requiring payment of back taxes and a background check. Again, there is a different process for immigrants who entered as minors.

**New Immigration System:** The Senate plan would provide green cards for Ph.D and master’s degree holders with STEM degrees, and it would also attempt to reduce backlogs.

**Employer Verification:** Employer verification would be mandatory for all workers and would include an accountability mechanism for employers who hire undocumented immigrants. It would also provide safeguards for American workers that include identity theft protections.

**New Process for Admitting Future Workers:**  Employers must demonstrate inability to hire American workers. There would be a new program for agricultural laborers, lower-skilled immigrant admission based on job creation, and strong labor protections.

**Key Players**

**Democrats:** Charles Schumer (NY), Richard Durbin (IL), Pat Leahy (VT) ,Bob Menendez (NJ), Michael Bennet (CO), Harry Reid (NV), Luis Gutierrez (IL) ,Zoe Lofgren (CA), Xavier Becerra (CA), John Yarmuth (KY)

**Republicans:** Mitch McConnell (KY), John McCain (AZ)**,** Lindsey Graham (SC)**,** Marco Rubio (FL), Jeff Flake (AZ)**,** Mario Diaz-Balart (FL)**,** John Carter (TX)**.** Sam Johnson (TX)**,** Raul Labrador (ID)**,** Bob Goodlatte (VA)**,** Eric Cantor (VA), John Boehner (OH), Michael McCaul (TX)

**STEM Education Visa Proposals:**

**I-Squared Act of 2013:** This proposal would raise the cap on H1-B visas to 115,000 and exempt holders of master’s degrees and higher from the cap. It would also allow dependent spouses to work. It would eliminate country caps for employment-based green card petition and exempt US STEM advanced degree holders from employment-based green card cap.

**StartUp Act 3.0:** The bill would create a new visa for US STEM advanced degree holders which would be capped at 50,000. It would also create a new visa for potential entrepreneurs that are already on employment visas in the US.

**Border Security and the Economy**

**Illegal Border Crossings a Product of Economic Conditions:** Studies have shown that illegal border crossings increase when the US economy does better than the Mexican economy. However, the Mexican economy is currently poised for significant growth, and border crossings have declined in recent years. Given the price of $28 billion annually and the time frame of six years to raise the level of security along the entire southwest border, questions have been raised about the net benefits of additional border security.