



COBURN'S CORNER

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## Securing Our Border First Step in Ending Illegal Immigration

*By U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn, M.D.*

As the U.S. Senate finally addresses the critical issue of illegal immigration it is important to note that illegal immigration is a threat to not only our national and economic security, but to our rich heritage of legal immigration. Besides Native Americans, all Americans can trace their heritage to immigrants. At one point, each of us or our descendents were welcomed to this nation by the words on the Statue of Liberty, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free ..."

America is a welcoming nation and one which recognizes the positive contributions legal immigrants have made throughout our history. But it is paramount we also remember America is a nation ruled by law. Tolerating illegal immigration is a departure from our heritage and is unfair to the millions of individuals who immigrated to this country legally. For these reasons, I adamantly oppose granting amnesty to illegal immigrants.

From a national security perspective alone border security should be a top national priority. The number of non-Mexicans detained at the border has increased by 42 percent since 2001, yet the pace of illegal immigrants streaming across our border has not changed.

As a first step, I'm pleased the Judiciary Committee accepted an amendment I authored that would nearly double the number of U.S. Border Patrol agents within two years. We have the resources

and technology to tighten control of our border and we should do so immediately.

Illegal immigration is creating a strain on local economies throughout Oklahoma and our entire nation. A clear example can be seen in the Oklahoma prison system, where the state spends an estimated \$11.7 million annually to incarcerate illegal criminal immigrants. I'm pleased the Judiciary Committee accepted an amendment I authored to make it easier for federal officials to deport illegal criminal immigrants.

The total estimated cost of illegal immigration in terms of health care, education and other benefits is nearly \$30 billion per year. Oklahomans are a hospitable people, but forcing taxpayers to subsidize free benefits for illegal immigrants is not charity; it's coercion.

Still, as a nation, we should feel honored so many people want to come to this country to participate in the American Dream. Few illegal immigrants have any intention of harming our country. In fact, many have a strong work ethic, support traditional values of faith and family, and simply yearn to breathe free and build a better life for themselves and their children. But we must remember to honor our heritage by ensuring "the huddled masses" that enter this country do so legally.

As the Senate moves forward on this issue, I will fight to ensure securing our border security while honoring our rich heritage of legal immigration is a top priority.