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Column for Week of:
March 17, 2008

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Illegal Immigration: A Big Issue for Missouri

We have reached the halfway point of the legislative session and as the General Assembly breaks this week for its mid-session recess, I'm looking ahead to an issue we are sure to discuss in the remaining weeks — illegal immigration.

The Senate currently has several proposals waiting in the wings regarding illegal immigration and the topic promises to be heartily debated until we can pass meaningful legislation that helps address the problem. With the federal government taking very few steps to crack down on illegal immigration, it is up to our state to chart its own course. In Missouri alone, experts estimate that in the past 15 years the population of illegal immigrants has risen from 10,000 to more than 55,000.

No where are the effects of illegal immigration felt more than in the workplace. When employers willfully and knowingly hire illegal immigrants rather than Missourians because they can pay a cheaper wage, they are doing a disservice to our state. [Senate Bill 858](#) addresses this problem by further penalizing employers who knowingly hire illegal workers as well as strengthening our state's immigration laws in general.

Other bills would bar illegal immigrants from obtaining certain state or local public benefits, including Missouri driver's licenses. Under this legislation, a driver's license issued to an illegal immigrant in another state would not be honored by Missouri.

There is a simple way to fix illegal immigration. The federal government in Washington needs to move immediately to secure our borders and stop the flow of illegal immigrants. In an age of international terrorist threats and rampant drug smuggling we cannot afford to have our borders open and porous. The federal government's failure to act ultimately causes problems for states like Missouri as we deal with higher costs as illegals use state services and as local law enforcement is forced to do the job of the Border Patrol.

At the same time, it is important to remember that we are a nation of immigrants. We should continue to welcome those from around the world who want to come and work to make America a better place. However, immigration must be orderly and regulated. All immigrants must apply for citizenship and be screened for criminal backgrounds and terrorist ties. Illegal immigration hurts everyone. Most of all it hurts those who are trying to immigrate legally who must wait many years for the opportunity as others cross the border in the dark of night.

If we don't change Missouri's policies we are providing an incentive to cross the border illegally. To reward people who break the law is counterintuitive. It is time for Missouri's policies to be changed.

If you have any comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.

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