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## Cracking Down on Illegal Immigration

One of the most important bills to come out of the 2008 legislative session was a sweeping anti-illegal immigration measure that fights this ever-increasing national, state and local problem on several fronts. With Washington proving either unable or unwilling to take decisive action on this issue, it has fallen to state legislators in Missouri and elsewhere to make the hard choices and address this growing crisis. The financially-crippling problem of illegal immigration costs American and Missouri taxpayers millions of dollars each year, while threatening the country's national security.

Our tough new laws are now among the strongest in the country. Some of the key provisions of Missouri's groundbreaking legislation, [House Bill 1549](#) (which becomes effective this week), include:

- Barring the state from issuing driver's licenses to illegal immigrants.
- Imposing criminal penalties for assisting illegal immigrants in obtaining driver's licenses.
- Requiring public agencies to verify legal status of applicants for welfare benefits.
- Requiring verification of legal employment status of all public employees.
- Canceling state contracts for contractors that hire illegal immigrants.
- Punishing employers who misclassify workers with penalties of \$50 per day per misclassified worker up to a maximum of \$50,000 in fines.
- Establishing citizenship status checks on those who are arrested.
- Prohibiting Missouri from creating "sanctuary cities"—a practice by some U.S. cities that sidesteps the law by adopting ordinances that ban police from asking individuals about immigration status.

I'm confident we've crafted laws that take a balanced approach to providing realistic solutions that will help minimize the impact of illegal immigration activity in Missouri. By placing tougher restrictions—along with tougher penalties—on employers who hire illegal immigrants and preventing illegal residents from receiving public benefits, we are taking away the two greatest incentives for people to cross our borders illegally.

This is a nation of immigrants. Giving a warm welcome to those who come here legally in hopes of making a better life for themselves and their families is part of what makes America great. However, when people enter the country illegally, they jump in front of those seeking to legally emigrate—a process that can take many, many years. This is fundamentally unfair and sends the message that law-breakers will be rewarded while those who respect our immigration laws will be punished.

Without these needed changes in Missouri's policies, the state would keep providing incentives for immigrants to cross the border illegally. In an age of terrorism where America's enemies continually plot our destruction, we cannot afford to have thousands of individuals secretly slipping back and forth across our border.

The 50 sister states of our union can only do so much to stem the tide of illegal immigration. It is primarily the duty and responsibility of our federal government to address this issue head on. However, not only has Congress failed to fix this problem, but federal law currently ties the hands of the states to do more. It is high time for Congress to act and to act decisively. It must either address this issue or stand aside and change federal law to allow the 50 states to do what Congress refuses to do.

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](mailto: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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