



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on April 3, 2014

U.S.-Mexican Bishops at the Border: Immigration Reform or Chaos?

A delegation of Catholic bishops from around the United States and Mexico paid a visit Tuesday to the U.S.-Mexican border, where they celebrated Mass and made an appeal to Congress for immigration reform. The bishops toured the city of Nogales on Arizona's border with Mexico, walking along a section that has been a crossing point for drug and human trafficking. They celebrated Mass just a few feet from a fence erected by the U.S. government in an effort to stem the flow of illegal immigrants. Priests and bishops offered Holy Communion to people on the Mexican side through openings in the steel border barrier. Several hundred people attended the Mass, which was translated into Spanish, the Associated Press [reported](#).



The clerics laid a wreath at the border wall in remembrance of those who have died attempting to make the crossing into the United States. The act mirrored an event last year in Lampedusa, Italy, when the pope threw a wreath into the Mediterranean Sea to remember migrants who have died attempting to reach Europe. According to reports of President Obama's meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican last week, the president and the spiritual leader of the world's more than one billion Catholics discussed immigration problems among other issues.

Immigration reform, a hot-button issue for years in American politics, remains stalled in Congress with Democrats and Republicans unable to reach an agreement on how to address the issue. The Senate, where Democrats are in the majority, passed a comprehensive immigration reform bill last June, but the measure stalled in the GOP-controlled House, where Republicans have argued for a piecemeal approach to reforming the system. House Democrats last week tried to force a vote on a comprehensive immigration bill, while Republicans remain reluctant to take up the issue in an election year in which the GOP hopes to gain a number of congressional seats at a time when President Obama and the Democrats face a rising tide of discontent over issues such as ObamaCare and prolonged economic stagnation, as well as illegal immigration. The issue could tip the scales in voting in Western border states that have been traditional Republican territory, but have swung to the Democrats in recent elections.

Republicans more than Democrats are wary of any move toward legalizing the status of those who entered the country unlawfully, since Tea Party and other conservative groups have frequently denounced legalization proposals as amnesty, even though they include fines, education requirements, and waiting periods for citizenship. Democrats seek to capitalize on their advantage among Hispanic and Latino voters by pushing for reform on immigration, while Republicans fear a backlash among white, non-Latino voters who have protested strongly the flood of immigrants they see as competing for



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American jobs and forcing down the price of labor. Many native-born U.S. workers also cite exploding budgets for schools and medical care to accommodate the growing ranks of illegal immigrants as reasons for effective action to stem the tide. Conservative opposition has also been led by prominent immigration hawks in the ranks of right-wing punditry, including syndicated columnists Michelle Malkin and Ann Coulter.

“According to the California Hospital Association, health care for illegal aliens is costing state taxpayers well over \$1 billion a year,” Coulter [wrote in a column](#) published Wednesday at townhall.com. “Eighty-four hospitals across California have already been forced to close because of unpaid bills by illegal aliens. Last year alone, California taxpayers paid \$32 million for indigents’ health care at hospitals located in Fresno County,” she wrote. Coulter, a lawyer-turned-journalist, wrote that much of the pressure for immigration reform is coming from wealthy landowners who want the low-wage immigrants to [harvest their crops](#), notwithstanding the attendant cost to the taxpaying public. That act of passing the bill to the taxpayers is a worse form of corporate welfare than the Wall Street bailouts that followed the collapse of the finance industry in 2007-2008, Coulter charged.

“At least the Wall Street bailouts didn’t alter the country forever by giving the Democrats 30 million new voters,” wrote Coulter, who argues that Republican support for any proposal that would reward and encourage yet more illegal migration would be political suicide for the GOP.

State Senator Al Melvin, a Republican candidate for governor of Arizona, told the AP he believes the event staged by the bishops will likely do more harm than good. The measures needed for safety and stability on both sides of the border, Melvin said, include the development of private-sector jobs in northern Mexico and the securing of the border to prevent drug and human trafficking.

“Frankly, and I am a Catholic, I think this is irresponsible of these bishops to be down there,” Melvin said. “They are not bringing stability to the border. They are adding to the chaos of the border. And it’s not helping to save lives. If anything, I believe it will contribute to more lives being lost. We need to secure the border to protect lives.”



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