

Response to the Debate on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

On December 16, 2005, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (HR 4437), a border security bill targeting illegal immigrants. Since its passage, the debate over the issue of illegal immigration in the United States has resulted in significant public protests. These protests have been carried out by immigrants and their supporters from such diverse groups as educational institutions, civil rights organizations, social service groups, unions, and houses of worship. No one is left untouched by this debate. In fact, the eyes of the world are carefully focused on the how this debate will result in political and cultural change in the United States.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL) represents approximately 14,000 members in more than 120 countries, in addition to 91 independent affiliates (47 inside the United States) composed of more than 47,000 additional members. As an organization whose mission is to ensure excellence in English language teaching to speakers of other languages, and whose members in the United States work daily with immigrants and their families, TESOL is very concerned about several of the immigration reform proposals currently under consideration in the U.S. Congress, as well as the tenor of the nationwide political debate.

With estimates of 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, there are clearly challenges with the U.S. immigration system. However, the issues are more complex than suggested by many of the proposals currently being made in the U.S. Congress. Solutions will not be reached by demonizing immigrants and their families. Draconian proposals such as building walls and turning undocumented workers into criminals are not only unworkable, but also are contrary to the values of pluralism, acceptance, and tolerance that make the United States such an attractive country in which to work, learn, and live.

Furthermore, TESOL is troubled by proposals to penalize those who offer assistance to undocumented workers and their families. English language educators working with immigrants and their families are focused on effective language teaching leading to high educational achievement for all learners. The deepest responsibility of educators is to educate their students well – not to police their students' immigrant status.

TESOL values respect for diversity, multiculturalism, and collaboration in a global community. The United States has grown and prospered through the measurable and immeasurable economic, linguistic, and cultural contributions of both documented and undocumented immigrants, and continues to do so. As such, TESOL urges fair immigration reform proposals that create pathways to citizenship and opportunities to learn English. Problems with the U.S. immigration system will only be fixed with equitable solutions that treat all human beings with respect.