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US immigration debate: Key players

Americans are deeply divided about how to deal with the estimated 11.5 million illegal immigrants in the United States, making immigration and border control key issues in this election year.

The debate has drawn in everyone from citizen activists to the president of the United States. Here are some of the key players:

GEORGE W BUSH, US president

President Bush has been urging legislators to reform the country's immigration laws, calling for a guest-worker programme to allow people with needed skills to live and work in the country temporarily.



Mr Bush has also backed the suggestion that illegal immigrants who already in the country should have a way to become citizens - but this faces stiff opposition from some in his own Republican party who see it as being too soft on lawbreakers.

The Senate is considering such a proposal, but the House of Representatives has already passed a much more punitive bill with neither of the measures the president seeks.

The issue is politically awkward for Mr Bush's party, because it brings into conflict two of its core supporters - the business lobby and social conservatives.

Mr Bush has said he wanted a bill that would "secure our borders" and "cause the people in the interior of this country to recognise and enforce the law".

He has also said it is important that the immigration system "treat people with dignity".

JOHN McCAIN, Republican senator of Arizona

Currently a frontrunner to be the Republican candidate for the 2008 presidential campaign, Mr McCain launched a national campaign to allow illegal immigrants to stay in the country legally as guest workers who could earn US citizenship.



Mr McCain argues that an overhaul of US immigration laws and forging a path toward legal status for illegal immigrants currently living in the US is the best option

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for the country on national security, economic, and humanitarian grounds.

He believes that granting legal status to undocumented workers will help drive the nation's economy.

Some of his supporters worry that that his policies will alienate him from the party's conservative voters.

EDWARD KENNEDY, Democratic senator of Massachusetts

Mr Kennedy, a liberal lion of the Senate, was a strong supporter of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act which dramatically changed US policy by abolishing national quotas on immigration.



On 10 April, the 74-year-old spoke to thousands in Washington condemning Republican legislation that would forcibly expel millions of illegal immigrants.

He was a co-sponsor, with Senator McCain, of the bill put forward last year which would allow a guest-worker programme and a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants. He said undocumented immigrants should "report and become American citizens".

JAMES SENSENBRENNER, Republican congressman of Wisconsin

Rep Sensenbrenner was a key sponsor of a bill passed in the House of Representatives in December 2005 which approved the building of 700 miles (1,130km) of barriers along parts of the border with Mexico, and made it a felony to remain in the US illegally or assist anyone else to do so.



He has heavily criticised the Senate bill that proposes to giving illegal immigrants a chance to become American citizens.

He has been a member of the House of Representatives since 1979.

TOM TANCREDO, Republican congressman of Colorado

Chairman of the House Immigration Reform Caucus, Rep Tancredo has campaigned throughout the US in support of tighter border controls and immigration reduction.

He has criticised Mr Bush, saying that "with his support for open borders and an amnesty programme, it is the president who is out of step with his own party".

The Colorado congressman has called for tougher enforcement of immigration laws and suggested the US could deport undocumented workers.

VICENTE FOX, Mexican president

Vicente Fox has been pressing for reforms that would allow more Mexicans to work legally in the US since he was elected president in 2000.



In December, he described the US proposal to build a fence along parts of its 2,000-mile-long (3,200km) border with Mexico as "shameful".

His government has accused US immigration policy of focusing too much on securing the border, while failing to acknowledge the "enormous contribution" that Mexican workers make to the US economy.

More than half the illegal immigrants in the US are believed to be from Mexico.

JUAN JOSE GUTIERREZ, Latino Movement USA

Juan Jose Gutierrez, national director of Latino Movement USA, has been one of the most outspoken campaigners for illegal immigrants' rights.

He was a key organiser of the nationwide 1 May boycott, designed to show the value of immigrants to the US economy, and a mass rally in Los Angeles on 25 March.

Mr Gutierrez has warned that current US immigration policy condemns illegal immigrants "to live and work in the conditions of modern-day slaves".

Arguing that undocumented workers create a net gain for the US economy, he says they should be given a chance to gain full citizenship.

PUEBLO SIN FRONTERAS, activist group

Chicago-based rights group Pueblo Sin Fronteras has backed the immigration reform bill put forward by Senators McCain and Kennedy.

Campaigners have urged all legal migrants to apply for citizenship, register to vote and then use their voice to demand legalisation for illegal immigrants.

Its president, Emma Lozano, has said US citizens must realise the immigration debate "is about real, human families, and their struggle to stay together".

THE MINUTEMAN PROJECT, activist group

US citizen activists calling themselves the Minutemen are taking direct action to stop what they call the "human flood" of illegal immigrants.

Named after militiamen of the American Revolution, the group recruits volunteers to "patrol" the border and report illegal entrants to the US Border Patrol.

Many liberals and Hispanic open-border supporters have condemned the movement as fuelling xenophobia and encouraging vigilantism. Minutemen leaders say their members abide by the law.

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