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SECURING THE NATION'S BORDERS (House of Representatives - January 4, 2005)

Mr. DREIER . Mr. Speaker, the past several months have seen an almost unprecedented focus in this body on the extremely important issue of homeland security. Just a few weeks ago, we passed the National Intelligence Reform Act, a landmark piece of legislation to overhaul our intelligence agencies. But, as I noted at that time, the bill unfortunately did not go far enough in addressing the major security vulnerability presented by the porous nature of our borders.

So as we continue to address the issue of border security, I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of Chairman Sensenbrenner's legislation to complete the San Diego border fence, and ensure that illegal immigrants are unable to receive drivers' licenses, something, I might add, already prohibited in my home state of California.

But in addition to these important steps that will soon be taken, I rise to ask for the support of my colleagues for an illegal immigration control plan that I am pleased to introduce today. The plan is the brainchild of T.J. Bonner, the President of the National Border Patrol Council, and a 26-year veteran of the Border Patrol who still serves with them today. T.J. believes that our proposal will eliminate up to 98 percent of the illegal border crossings into the United States.

T.J. and I share the belief that for any proposal to stop illegal immigration to be successful, it must get at the root cause of what attracts illegal immigrants to our country--and that is the lure of economic opportunity and the ease with which illegal workers can find jobs. Under the Bonner Plan, we will dramatically increase the enforcement of laws which prohibit American businesses from employing illegal immigrants. Regrettably, too many employers have been unwilling to comply with the law. The growing availability of counterfeit identity documents has also undermined the current system because employers are increasingly unable to establish the authenticity of documents presented by job applicants.

Our legislation adds new features to the Social Security card to deter counterfeiting and make it easier for employers to determine whether a card is genuine by including a digitized photo of the cardholder on the card. The improved Social Security card will also be encoded with a unique electronic encryption code to allow employers to verify each prospective applicant's work eligibility status prior to hiring, through either an electronic card-reader or a toll-free telephone number. Employers will face stiff federal fines of \$50,000 and up to 5 years in prison if they hire an illegal immigrant or choose not to verify a prospective employee's work eligibility. The employer would also be required to reimburse the government for the cost of deporting the illegal immigrant.

With the improved Social Security card and national verification system, employers will have no excuse for hiring illegal immigrants. By eliminating the supply of jobs for illegal workers, we will end the incentive for illegal immigrants to enter the United States because they will know that they will be unable to make a living here. Legal workers will only need to update their Social Security card once, to have their photo placed on the card and for other long-overdue anti-fraud measures to be applied. A worker would only need the updated Social Security card when applying for a new job. I want to make it very, very clear that this proposal does not represent the creation of a national identification card. This bill strictly prohibits the use of the Social Security card as a national ID card, and stipulates that the card not be required to be routinely carried on one's person. Social Security cards are often already required to be provided to new employers; the changes we are proposing to the Social Security card take us no further down the road of creating a national ID card. Finally, the Bonner Plan also puts teeth into the new enforcement procedures by calling for the addition of 10,000 new Homeland Security officers whose sole responsibility will be to enforce employer compliance with the law. These new agents will free up the rest of the Border Patrol to exclusively focus on border enforcement and terrorism prevention.

Mr. Speaker, I do not stand here today to tell the rest of the world that we intend to limit opportunities for the American dream to be fulfilled. But if foreign nationals wish to come to the United States, they must, as Governor Schwarzenegger said, "play by the rules," and we must make clear that there will be no economic opportunity for anyone who enters this country illegally. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues in this effort, and hope they will consider joining me as we take action on this vital national security priority.