

Senate approves legislation to militarize US-Mexico border

Thomas Gaist
29 June 2013

The US Senate on Thursday passed the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013, with significant support from both big business parties. The legislation beefs up the repressive and surveillance capacities of the state, militarizes the entire US-Mexico border zone, in what senators have described as a “border surge,” and creates a new category of second-class citizens.

The security portion of the bill calls for a massive ramping up of the police presence and military hardware along the border, with 20,000 new border patrol agents, doubling the total to 40,000. It also calls for 700 miles of new fencing and the deployment of National Guard elements.

Under the bill, the border will be subject to “persistent surveillance,” with “continuous and integrated manned or unmanned monitoring, sensing or surveillance of 100 percent of southern border mileage or the immediate vicinity of the southern border.”

Unmanned aerial drones will be deployed on a 24/7 basis, creating a “drone zone” stretching up to 100 miles north of the border. Vehicle Dismount and Exploitation Radar (VADER) systems will be deployed, as well as a dizzying array of monitoring technologies, including thousands of ground sensors, cameras, infrared and night-vision scopes, and a fleet of 40 new helicopters.

Taken together, these provisions will triple government spending on border security to a grand total of \$46 billion. Republican Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee, one of the authors of the bill, frankly described the security measures as “almost overkill.”

The US-Mexico border is being transformed into a fully militarized zone, resembling conflict areas such as Israel-Palestine. Democratic Senator Charles Schumer of New York lauded the creation of a “virtual human

fence.”

The bill also universalizes the anti-democratic E-Verify system, a massive information reservoir operated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The E-Verify program assembles biographic information on employees in a nationwide computer network. The law stipulates that no immigrants will receive green cards until E-Verify has been implemented at every work place across the US.

Under the new law, all employers will be required to begin using E-Verify within 5 years, and foreigners entering or leaving the US will be subject to new forms of biometric tracking.

Mandatory E-Verify establishes something approaching a national identification system. National ID, long resisted by the American people, is being slipped in through the backdoor under the guise of immigration reform.

The American Civil Liberties Union has characterized the effect of the E-Verify program as “inverting the relationship between the individual and government” by forcing individuals to undergo screening and receive “affirmative permission” before carrying out basic life activities.

The ACLU stated that the legislation “takes significant steps toward a ‘cardless’ national ID system which could be used to track and limit Americans’ movements and activities.”

As the *New York Times* acknowledged in an article Thursday, “[M]ost Americans are unaware of the mandate’s broad scope.” The *Times* observed that many will face “unexpected bureaucratic headaches” and “even lose new jobs” as a result.

Democratic Senator Chris Coons admitted that E-Verify can become “a single, national, searchable database of vital biographic information and

photographs of nearly every American.”

Immigration policy analyst David Bier observed, “I don’t think people really understand that this creates a regulation not just for every employer, or for every immigrant, but also for every citizen in this country.”

The “regulation” that the bill creates is that all citizens will have to undergo background checks, having their life history scrutinized and recorded in a vast government database, in order to start a new job.

Homeland Security has had access to 113 million State Department passport records and photos since 2010, but the expanded variant of E-Verify contained in the immigration bill will allow the department to access all 212 million drivers licenses and extend access to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Vigorous bi-partisan support for universal E-Verify provides yet another illustration of the commitment of the entire political establishment to the dismantling of democratic rights and buildup of a police state apparatus. The legislation was prepared by the “Gang of Eight” senators, which includes leading Democrats and Republicans, and is backed by the Obama administration.

The “path to citizenship” component of the bill involves arduous and convoluted procedures that immigrants will have to navigate in pursuit of legal status. Undocumented immigrants will first have to apply for registered provisional immigrant (RPI) status, paying a \$500 fine in the process. RPIs are banned from receiving any federal health or welfare benefits, and will have fewer legal rights than citizens.

Once they have lived for 10 years in the US as RPIs, immigrants then have the opportunity to apply for a green card, paying an additional \$1,000 fine. Leaving the US at any time during the entire process will invalidate their citizenship application.

The multi-tiered system elaborated in the path to citizenship establishes preferential treatment for skilled laborers, reflecting the massive input of hi tech corporations that want access to highly educated foreigners whom they can hire at lower wage rates than those paid to Americans. Rather than enabling immigrants to live in the US free from state harassment or deportation, the real purpose of the “path to citizenship” is to provide an increased supply of cheap labor for exploitation by the US capitalist elite.

The Obama administration is presenting the bill as progressive legislation that will allow millions of immigrants to gain citizenship status. “Today, the Senate did its job. It’s now up to the House to do the same,” President Barack Obama declared after the vote.

Republican House leaders have indicated, however, that they will not pass the bill in its present form in the lower chamber.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact