Arizona Must Show Bold Leadership in Immigration Reform
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I am a native Arizonan who loves Mexico. I lived there during my sophomore year of high school as a foreign exchange student. I also believe in the rule of law. In November, I volunteered for one week in Mexico City to help train Mexican prosecutors in oral advocacy as that country transitions to a criminal justice system that resembles the due process we enjoy in this country.

I support border security but have lamented policies that punish work ethic, ignore the wealth of culture, diversity and trade opportunities our neighbors to the south bring to our state, and fail to heed the humanity in all of us to help others.

Our broken immigration system calls for comprehensive reform built on principles of consensus. It is time for Arizona to move from accusations to action. It is time for Arizona to lead with solutions and show the federal government how leadership through consensus-driven decisions can work.

That is why I wholeheartedly embrace the S.A.N.E. Solution to Federal Immigration, developed by a coalition named The Real Arizona. The consensus platform moves beyond an enforcement-only approach. Current policy that focuses only on border security is simply ineffective, and ignores the estimate that approximately half of those illegally in this country entered lawfully and overstayed visas.

Arizona will benefit from advancing this set of guiding principles.

First, it calls for gaining operational control of our borders as achieved by the Yuma, San Diego and El Centro sectors.

Step two is to account for the approximately eleven million who are in the United States without lawful authority. The task to engage in a massive deportation effort is not operationally feasible and disregards families of combined legal and unlawful status. The platform will require them to register, pay a fee, apply for temporary legal residency with authorization to work, undergo background checks, and deport those with felony convictions.

At the end of a five-year period, those who have completed all the administrative steps and are eligible for permanent legal residency may so petition. Provisions for those present without lawful authority who were brought to this country as children can be implemented within the context of this framework. The S.A.N.E. coalition did not reach a consensus on the question of citizenship, recognizing this is a difficult question for the federal government to address.

This is also an opportunity to collect an objective set of data to identify true labor needs for the U.S. labor market, including high-tech, skilled, day labor and seasonal workers. This data should form the basis for bureaucratic reforms to our immigration system.
Next, the platform calls for the streamlining of the federal bureaucratic process for legally entering the United States. We can grow our economy by establishing a market-based immigration process that supports a range of work force needs, from seasonal to highly skilled workers, matching labor needs with those who want to work, and reduces wait time for visas.

Finally, the S.A.N.E. Solution seeks to engage all levels of government to create a secure system for employers nationwide to verify the legal work eligibility of employees. Immigration reform needs ongoing cooperation among local, state, federal officials and businesses to verify legal work-eligibility and enforce violations. In taking steps to reform our current system, a continued commitment to maintaining a secure environment for citizens and those here legally is imperative.

It is clear that the existing immigration system has not worked and will never work. It is time for a S.A.N.E. approach. I applaud the members of the coalition who have worked for two years to build a consensus approach to immigration that secures our border, strengthens our economy, and expands opportunities to increase trade and tourism.

The S.A.N.E. guiding principles demonstrate bold Arizona leadership and show Congress how to overcome the impasse on immigration reform. More information on the platform can be found at www.therealarizona.org.